PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2000–01

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8 May 2001

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 368**

TENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2000–01

House of Commons

Tuesday 8 May 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Employment

1. **Mr. Ian Davidson** (Glasgow, Pollok): What recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive about levels of employment in Scotland. [159289]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a wide range of matters, including employment, especially given that we in Scotland now have the lowest unemployment since 1976 and the highest employment since 1960. Since the 1997 election employment is up by 105,000, long-term unemployment is down by 60 per cent. and youth unemployment is down by 2,000. The First Minister and I therefore have very fruitful and positive conversations.

Mr. Davidson: Is the Secretary of State aware that unemployment in my constituency has been cut by 40 per cent. since the general election? Is she aware that youth unemployment has been cut by more than 70 per cent? Is she able to give answers to those very difficult questions from the Dispatch Box today?

While much has been done, does my right hon. Friend agree that there is still much to do? Does she accept that Pollok requires its own jobcentre? [HON. MEMBERS: "More, more!"] Thank you.

Does my right hon. Friend accept that Govan and Yarrow shipbuilders require firm Ministry of Defence orders now? Does she also accept that it is about time that we had a general election?

Mrs. Liddell: Whenever my hon. Friend comes to the House, I am filled with trepidation about what he might ask me. I can tell him, however, that much has been done and there is much to do, but there is also much to lose. I agree with him that it is time for a general election.

I note my hon. Friend's point about a jobcentre in Pollok; I have already raised it with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities. The Ministry of Defence has gone to considerable lengths to secure MOD orders for Govan. I know that the work force are still troubled about the possibility of difficulties during the spill-over period. I have met them, and I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence intends to do so shortly.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): The Secretary of State will know that the unemployment figures in Campbeltown in my constituency are twice the Scottish average. Following the recent announcement of the closure of the Jaeger factory—which was a terrible blow to the town, as Jaeger was its last major employer—can the right hon. Lady confirm that the Campbeltown-Ballycastle ferry will be reinstated, and, in particular, that the Ministry of Defence is no longer dragging its feet with regard to the turbine factory at Machrihanish?

The people of Campbeltown live in isolation at the end of a peninsula, cut off and too often forgotten by Government. They really need to hear some concrete news for the future.

Mrs. Liddell: First, let me wish the hon. Lady well as she approaches her retirement. Indeed, some 18 Scottish Members in all parties are not seeking re-election, and I take this opportunity to commend them for the distinguished service that they have given. That applies particularly to the hon. Lady, who comes from a very distinguished political background. She has served her party and her country with distinction.

The hon. Lady and I share a great love of Argyll, and I look forward to meeting her in the future—perhaps when we watch the shinty, although I suspect that on that occasion I shall be supporting Kyles of Bute while she will be supporting Oban Camanachd. Undoubtedly, she will have an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of her constituency.

The hon. Lady spoke of problems in Campbeltown and the Mull of Kintyre. I have been very conscious of the difficulties that could be created as a result of the closure of the Jaeger factory, and prior to that my colleagues and I have looked closely at activities on the Mull of Kintyre. I am delighted to be able to announce that discussions have taken place between the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Executive and my own Scotland Office about the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry, and that we will now test the market with a view to making concrete progress by the summer—assuming that the market conditions are right. I know that that will give a considerable boost not just to the Mull of Kintyre, but to all that part of Argyll.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State has had discussions with colleagues in the MOD about Vesta, and I understand that considerable progress is being made. I think that there are positive signs, and I hope the hon. Lady will be reassured by that.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Has my right hon. Friend noted that no Conservative Member has even tried to speak of unemployment? Could that be because the Conservatives are embarrassed by the fact that the last time the unemployment figures were as low as this, Labour was in government?

As I leave the House after 14 years representing Maryhill, let me say that I came here hoping that something could be done about the appalling levels of unemployment in my constituency. It took a Labour Government to bring those figures down. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) said, a great deal has been done and there is more to do.

Mrs. Liddell: I also wish my hon. Friend well as she approaches her retirement; the warmth of the response to her is very well known. She is also right to remind us of how much we have to lose if this Labour Government are not re-elected. All of us who lived through those bleak Tory years remember what happened to unemployment in cities such as Glasgow and in my own constituency in Lanarkshire.

Many of our traditional industries were decimated by the Tories. Therefore, I am happy to announce that the European Commission has today given authority for the payment of £18 million of assistance to Longannet deep mine, fulfilling the second tranche of assistance to secure the future of the coal industry in Scotland. That is a great tribute not only to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), but to the late Donald Dewar, whose commitment to Longannet was second to none.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): Would the Secretary of State—who has been boasting so much of the success of the Government's action in Scotland—like to assure my constituents in Devon that Scotland will no longer be wanting the £861-odd extra per head of population that it receives, unlike my constituents; that the levels of benefit that it receives will come down to those received by the whole of the nation; and that it will not continue to receive much more money than is available to the rest of the United Kingdom including England?

Mrs. Liddell: That was a very interesting exposition of Tory policy. Labour Members, however, believe in governing for the many and not for the few. We have achieved much in this Parliament, but we still have much to do. On unemployment, though, we now have the prospect of full employment for all of the United Kingdom, which is something that I have wanted to achieve in my political lifetime. It could be snatched away if Conservative Members were ever again to be elected to government. It is interesting that the right hon. Gentleman is taking the same line as the Scottish National party, whose members will be Hague's little helpers in the forthcoming general election as they seek to ensure the election of a Tory Government.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Like my right hon. Friend and all Labour Members, I will never forget the devastation caused to mining communities by the actions of the previous Government and how, for many thousands of redundant miners, the only jobs on offer were as £2 an hour security guards. I pay tribute to her and to the previous First Minister, Donald Dewar, for securing the future for the only deep mine left in Scotland. Does she agree that the best future for that deep mine rests with the return of a Labour Government?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appeal for shorter questions and, of course, for shorter answers. I also remind the House that we are on Scottish questions. The general election campaign will be fought elsewhere.

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) is aware that the coal industry faced very significant difficulties when we were first elected to government and that the introduction of a stricter gas consents policy allowed a breathing space for the coal industry to find its place in a competitive market. I am very glad that we have been able to make real progress on Longannet deep mine, which is the last deep mine in Scotland. I am also pleased that we have been able to make progress on delivering compensation to those miners who, over very many years, gave their health so that we could have a coal industry—an industry that was treated with contempt by Conservative Members.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Just for once, I find myself in agreement with the hon. Member for

Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson), who said that it is time that we had a general election. So it is—so that we can have a change of Government. *[Interruption.]* As people in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom know perfectly well—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) keeps asking whether I know where Pollok is. Of course I know where Pollok is. However, that is not what we are here to discuss. We are here to discuss Scotland's economy and Scotland's unemployment levels and to hold this Government, however temporarily, to account for what they are doing.

The fact is that people in Scotland know perfectly well that the reason for the present strength of the Scottish economy is not the policies of this Government, but the policies of the previous Conservative Government which have not yet been destroyed. Indeed, 67 per cent. of people in Scotland think that taxes there are too high. They are right and they know what to do about it. On unemployment, as on other matters, the Government are very good at spin, but not good at delivery. Some of us believe in delivery and—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think there was a question there.

Mrs. Liddell: I was getting quite worried about the hon. Lady, given her forthcoming happy event, which I understand is to be in July. I wish her well for that. Her loyalty to her party is very well known, but I hope that it does not mean that she has to call the child Orinoco. We are well aware of what the previous Government did to Scotland. Those of us who represent constituencies in Scotland saw long-term unemployment rocket and a dearth of hope for young people in our communities.

The hon. Lady talks about taxation. The general election is coming up and one of the anxieties that I have for my constituents is to ensure that the working families tax credit continues for those families who have been given a ladder out of poverty and that the children's tax credit continues delivering £520 to families with children. Those are the policies that this Government have pursued. We are asking for a further opportunity to advance those policies and we have a lot to lose if the Conservatives win the general election.

National Minimum Wage

2. **Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North): How many people in Scotland have benefited from the national minimum wage since its introduction. [159290]

The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes): More than 120,000 people in every constituency in Scotland, including Aberdeen, North, have benefited from the national minimum wage since it was introduced by the Labour Government in April 1999. I remind my hon. Friend and the House that on 1 October the national minimum wage will be increased by almost 11 per cent.—that is greater than the increase in average earnings—except in the admittedly unlikely event of the election of a Tory Government who are committed to scrapping it. It is absolutely vital that that does not happen.

Mr. Savidge: In Aberdeen, the national minimum wage has proved particularly beneficial to women. Can my hon. Friend indicate how far that has been the general pattern? Given the general success of the policy, does he agree that when the non-voting record of certain parties comes under scrutiny—with apologies to Shakespeare—"Gentlemen from Scotland, then a-bed, shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here."? Stand up for Scotland? They cannot even stay up for Scotland!

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is right in every respect. Some 70 per cent. of the beneficiaries of the minimum wage have been women. It has had the greatest effect on women's pay since the Equal Pay Act 1970. I am pleased to see that some Tories are rising, to ask questions as they said that jobs would be lost because of the national minimum wage. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Unemployment has gone down and employment has gone up in every part of the United Kingdom. I notice that SNP Members are not even standing to ask questions on this. As my hon. Friend rightly said, they were not here to go through the Lobby to vote for a national minimum wage. How can they stand up for Scotland when they do not even turn up for Scotland?

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Does the Minister recognise that, while the Liberal Democrats welcome the fact that the minimum wage has stopped the worst employment practices in terms of low pay, many people do not work in paid employment but run a small business or a farm? Because of the current foot and mouth epidemic, many of those people's incomes are below the minimum wage. Will he therefore ensure that the Prime Minister recognises that, although the number of foot and mouth cases may be tailing off, the economic consequences will be felt in the rural economy for many years after the last case has been reported?

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman makes a very sensible point, although it grieves me somewhat to say so. The Government understand the difficulties created by foot and mouth. That is why we have put in place a great deal of help for farmers and people involved in agriculture, and for those affected indirectly. The hon. Gentleman will know that the increase in the minimum wage was announced in March, which has given people a significant amount of time to prepare. I am sure that he would not want people currently struggling on low pay to suffer as a result of the foot and mouth epidemic. Obviously, we must take account of the effects of foot and mouth disease, which are felt by employees as well as employers.

Anti-drugs Strategy

3. **Mrs. Rosemary McKenna** (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): What recent discussions she has had with the First Minister concerning the Government's anti-drugs strategy. [159291]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I meet regularly with the First Minister and discuss a range of topics, including how to tackle the menace of drug abuse in Scotland. I know that my hon. Friend is anxious to hear about that

Mrs. McKenna: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the creation of the Scottish communities against drugs fund? It will make money available to those strapped communities fighting a campaign against drugs in Scotland to make their areas drug free and to offer a more positive environment for people at risk from drugs. Will she also join me in welcoming the support of the *Daily Record*?

Mrs. Liddell: May I begin by assuming that the whole House will want to join me in wishing my hon. Friend a very happy birthday? I understand that it is a significant one.

The issue of drugs is very important in Scotland. It is a classic example of a matter for which there is a need for partnership between the Government at Westminster and the Scottish Executive. I congratulate the Scottish Executive on this afternoon's launch of the Scottish Communities against drugs fund. I also congratulate the *Daily Record* on its campaign to raise money to be spent on community projects to tackle the horror of drug abuse. I urge all hon. Members concerned about drugs in our community to make a personal contribution to the campaign, as every pound raised by the *Daily Record* will be matched by the Scottish Executive.

The legislation covering the proceeds of crime is another example of partnership, and it will ensure that drug dealers' assets are confiscated. That is also vital. Indeed, the Scottish Executive, in partnership with the Government at Westminster, established the Scottish Drug Enforcement Agency, which has £15 million and 200 dedicated officers to fight drug abuse.

Barnett Formula

4. **Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): What discussions she has held with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on the Barnett formula. [159292]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Deputy Prime Minister, on a variety of matters.

Mr. Salmond: Does not the Secretary of State find it ironic that, at a time when she is accusing the Tory party of wanting to cut £8 billion of public spending, the Deputy Prime Minister is aiming to reduce spending in Scotland by £1,000 a head? Even London brokers say that Scotland's surplus of revenue over expenditure comes to £100 million a month. Should not the Scottish Parliament therefore have control over revenue, rather than being at the mercy of an anti-Scottish cabal in the Cabinet?

Did not the Deputy Prime Minister say that the Barnett formula was not set in stone, and forecast blood on the carpet? Why was No. 10 so anxious to say that right hon. Gentleman was not talking about the Barnett formula, if not because of the anxiety of Labour Members to keep the issue quiet until the election is safely over?

Mrs. Liddell: One thing that one can say with certainty is that the hon. Gentleman is never happier than when he is whingeing for Scotland. This Government have no plans to change the Barnett formula, and we have delivered £8.5 billion more in public expenditure for Scotland. The hon. Gentleman's party's plans for Scotland would mean a reduction of about £500 million in expenditure on health, £500 million less expenditure on local authorities and £500 million less for other services such as transport, housing and economic development. The health service in Scotland has benefited to the tune of more than £400 million. The SNP's plans for Scotland would have meant an increase in health expenditure of a puny £38 million. We would take the hon. Gentleman much more seriously—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the right hon. Lady to sit down.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): If the right hon. Lady is right in her view of the firmness of the Government in respect of the Barnett formula, will she explain why, when I asked her Department in writing on 11 January about its intentions towards the formula, it took two and a half months to deliver the completely anodyne reply that the Government supported the retention of the formula? Why was there that delay if the Government were not considering scrapping it?

Mrs. Liddell: I was not in the Department on 11 January. We have discussed the matter twice at Question Time—perhaps on occasions when the hon. Gentleman was not here.

Mr. Grieve: As usual, the right hon. Lady is less than frank about the position. Why did it take so long to answer the question? Is not the reality that the Government knew very well on 11 January that they were considering scrapping the formula and were trying to put that forward in a way that might be presentable? Would the Government not be reneging on a key commitment that they made in the past by scrapping the formula, which would be part of the complete dissolution of this country that is being brought about, through the agency of the Deputy Prime Minister, as part of the regional policy?

Mrs. Liddell: I find it interesting that the hon. Gentleman's colleague Sir Malcolm Rifkind made it clear that he could not guarantee maintaining spending in Scotland; this was the man who said that the poll tax was a very good experiment for Scotland.

The Government have no plans to change the Barnett formula and have increased public expenditure in Scotland by £8.5 billion. The Conservative party would cut £24 million from every constituency in Scotland if they were elected.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Human Rights Act

24. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): On how many occasions she has been requested to give advice on the implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998 in Scotland; and if she will make a statement. [159313]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): When requested, I give advice, as a United Kingdom Law Officer, on a variety of matters including questions concerning the implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful to the Advocate-General for repeating her answer to my question of one month ago. Will she now tell me how many times she has been requested to give legal advice, what the cost of such advice has been on such occasions and what the total cost of implementing the Human Rights Act in Scotland has been?

The Advocate-General: Duplication—we call it corroboration in Scotland—is a doctrine with which the hon. Lady may be familiar. It is a long-standing tradition that Law Officers do not advise about the questions that they have been asked—one which Law Officers on both sides of the House recognise.

I am not going to answer the hon. Lady's question because of that general convention, which Administrations of all complexions have followed for many years, and from which I see no reason to depart on this occasion. So far as the cost is concerned, my salary is a matter of public record; hon. Members can look it up.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that, in terms of human rights in Scotland, the Disability Rights Commission will always have an important part to play? It is one of the finest achievements of the Government. Will she remember that hundreds of thousands of people in Scotland are delighted that this United Kingdom Parliament delivered that measure?

The Advocate-General: With some assistance from my right hon. Friend, the convention on human rights has been delivered in Scotland. It is an important step that individual citizens can now exercise their rights and have their rights guaranteed by the domestic courts of this country, which is a much cheaper and quicker alternative than going to Strasbourg.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Having just treated the House to that extraordinary mixture of incompetence and contempt, will the Advocate-General tell us what she is for?

The Advocate-General: Certainly. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to listen, I will tell him—at length, if Mr. Speaker permits. Under the Scotland Act 1998, I have a number of functions. I inherited the advisory functions of the Lord Advocate and the Solicitor-General. I advise the United Kingdom Government about a range of matters on not only Scots law but European law, including the European convention on human rights. I also sit on a number of Cabinet Committees. I have a statutory role under section 33 of the 1998 Act of considering Scottish Parliament legislation, and—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about human rights, not about the Advocate-General's role.

25. **Mr. David Stewart** (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): If she will make a statement on her role in monitoring the impact of the Human Rights Act 1998. [159314]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): If the human rights point raises a devolution issue, it must be intimated to me and I have powers to intervene. I am also kept informed about the general impact of the Human Rights Act, including important court cases. With reference to the question from the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), it is because of the devolution aspects that I have a role in relation to human rights.

Mr. Stewart: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that the advantage of the Human Rights Act is that it makes justice more accessible for ordinary people by fast-tracking access to the United Kingdom courts, avoiding the cost and the delays involved in going to Strasbourg? How long does it take to raise a case now?

The Advocate-General: A human rights case can be raised with great speed in the domestic courts in Scotland. Depending on the situation, it could be raised and dealt with by the court within a few days. The appeal process has shown that human rights issues can be taken through the entire process, all the way to the Privy Council, within months, which is a vast improvement on the previous situation, whereby individual citizens sometimes had to wait years before a court considered their claim.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Magistrates Courts

29. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If she will make a statement on the role of the private finance initiative in the provision of new magistrates courts. [159318]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Jane Kennedy): The private finance initiative is used to procure new magistrates courts throughout England and Wales. I am happy to make a statement on the subject.

Projects for 13 magistrates courts committees are in various stages of procurement. The first of the new courts to come into use under this funding route will open later this year at Kidderminster, Hereford and Worcester.

Mr. Luff: The Minister will know how glad I am that the Government continued with the construction of new magistrates courts under PFI that was started by the previous Government. Would not it be wrong, however, to sacrifice smaller, rural magistrates courts such as

Evesham on the altar of PFI, especially when they are being asked to provide extra capacity during the construction of the new courts?

Jane Kennedy: I am happy to pay tribute to the representations that the hon. Gentleman made during the consultation on the original closure programme introduced by the magistrates courts committee in Hereford and Worcester, and I acknowledge that, as the Worcester court has become inoperable because the police no longer use it, Evesham is now one of the courts that is used for the excess work. I understand that the committee intends shortly to hold consultations on proposals for courthouse closures, but as no decisions have yet been made, I cannot comment on any such proposals.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will my hon. Friend ensure that PFIs can be used to bring existing courthouses up to scratch, so that the jailing sections meet the modern European standard?

Jane Kennedy: I absolutely concur with the point that my hon. Friend is making about security. PFIs are indeed being used for a range of purposes, and not only new build, important though that is. For example, once such initiative is providing refurbished courthouses at Redditch.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Parliamentary Secretary talks about the use of private finance in magistrates courts, but has she considered the figures revealed this morning in one of the national newspapers by the distinguished legal correspondent, Joshua Rozenberg, that show that in Greater London fines worth more than £92 million remained uncollected last year alone? Does she not recognise that judges and magistrates are increasingly concerned that the mismanagement and incompetence of her noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has led to a collapse in confidence in collecting fines and in other non-custodial penalties? On the day the Prime Minister finally dared to call a general election, which he will lose, should not the Parliamentary Secretary recognise that the Lord Chancellor must acknowledge that he is the weakest link and say goodbye?

Jane Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman may not know that successive Governments have considered that fine enforcement would be more effective if such work were transferred from the police to the magistrates courts committees, which can give it a higher priority. However, this Government have delivered that modernisation to the magistrates courts committees. That is a measure of our confidence in their ability to handle that work. He and his party propose to take £525 million out of the justice system, so it is rich for him to lecture us on modernisation and improvements in the service.

Justices of the Peace

30. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If she will make a statement on the progress being made to allow people from a wider range of social backgrounds to become JPs. [159319]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Jane Kennedy): I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about this issue. As I said in a written answer:

> "my noble and learned Friend, the Lord Chancellor, has asked for a national strategy for the recruitment of lay magistrates to be developed."—[*Official Report*, 3 April 2001; Vol. 366, c. 173W.]

The local advisory committees do a lot of good work to encourage people from all walks of life to apply. I ask all hon. Members to help us to get the message across that we want benches to be representative of the community that they serve.

Mr. Chapman: Is it not important that that representational approach reflects the ethnic, social and political mix of the community? Is it not vital to focus on making the bench more equitable? Will the Minister consider, for example, shortening the hours of commitment, so that the bench is more accessible to working people? Will she also consider improving the image of the bench, which is not as good as it should be?

Jane Kennedy: I will, of course, take careful note of all the points that my hon. Friend raises. The Lord Chancellor was one of the first Lord Chancellors to consider that political balance may not be an appropriate way to measure social balance on benches, and that was the result of the landslide at the last general election.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the hon. Lady accept that whatever has gone wrong in her Department, we all know that it was not her fault? So magnificent has been her stewardship that we know that this is the last time we shall see her before she rockets to greater heights, in the shadow Cabinet. Does she agree that what matters most is that such people, who perform an incredibly important job in the community, are seen to be truly effective, and that anything that takes our eye off that ball would be a great mistake?

Jane Kennedy: I am conscious that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to help me, and I hope that the Prime Minister was listening.

The hon. Gentleman is right; the pre-eminent requirement is personal suitability for appointment to the job, and more than 30,000 people from all walks of life serve as lay magistrates.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): There are hairdressers.

Jane Kennedy: As my hon. Friend says, the magistracy includes hairdressers. Being a magistrate is not an easy task, and I am sure that the House will join me in paying tribute to magistrates for the important work that they do.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Will the Minister comment on her Department's success in recruiting people from the ethnic minority community to the magistrates bench? What sort of gender balance has been achieved from within that community?

Jane Kennedy: We seek constantly to review the balance and make-up of benches. It is important that hon.

Members on both sides of the House support us in every step that we take along the route to ensuring that the bench is properly representative of the community from which it is drawn. We are doing well in recruiting in the ethnic communities, but we have a lot more to do, and that message needs to go out from the House.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): The Minister uttered some fine words, but in many parts of the country they are meaningless. Because of the magistrates courts closures under the Government, a number of people from wider social backgrounds have been forced to leave the lay magistracy. The Government have commissioned an inquiry into the cost-effectiveness of the lay magistracy. Auld has reported. Will the Minister tell us what the Government's policies are for the future of the lay magistracy and whether it has a future at all under the Government?

Jane Kennedy: On every occasion that such points are made to me, I demonstrate not only in fine words but with examples how we are working hard to promote the magistracy, and to improve and modernise the service that magistrates give their communities. It is Opposition Members who question that commitment who cause magistrates to have doubts. I strongly recommend that the hon. Gentleman consider the words of his hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who, during proceedings on the Criminal Justice (Mode of Trial) (No. 2) Bill, said that he had far more confidence in a judge and jury than in a bench of magistrates. Had we passed that Bill, it would have been living testament to the Government's commitment to the magistracy.

Rural Courtrooms (IT)

31. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): If he will make a statement on the use of information technology to support rural courtrooms. [159320]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. David Lock): New IT systems and services are being developed both for magistrates courts and county courts. The Libra system will link together all magistrates courts and allow links into other criminal justice agencies. On 15 January, I published a consultation paper on the development of IT in the civil courts, which I trust the hon. Member has read. I look forward to his response.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Minister for that invitation to read his document. I shall read it assiduously because his Department's proposals for rural courthouses in my constituency are very poor indeed. The proposal to close two or three courthouses in Ceredigion is at least being fought by the local county council. It has made an interesting suggestion on the use of IT to support rural courthouses: a main courthouse for the county, with satellite courthouses linked by IT systems. Will the Minister welcome that? Will he also give an assurance that financial considerations will not stand in the way of such additional and innovative solutions, which may deliver justice to rural areas? Finally, following his consultation paper, will he tell us what guidance he is likely to produce to encourage magistrates courts committees to look beyond financial questions and consider innovative solutions?

Mr. Lock: The purpose of magistrates courts is to deliver justice. I am sure that local justice is an important consideration, whether in the hon. Gentleman's constituency or in any part of the United Kingdom. I am grateful to the county council for its co-operation and for taking advantage of the opportunities presented by IT. That is precisely what the consultation paper is all about, as he will see when he gets around to reading it. I know that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, who will consider the appeal in due course, will consider those matters seriously. I am grateful for all the work that has gone into ensuring that a large measure of local justice is still delivered in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Minister tell us what access and technology will be available for the rural courts that have closed under his Government's stewardship, especially those in Bakewell, Ashbourne and Matlock? That means that there is no local justice in West Derbyshire.

Mr. Lock: The hon. Gentleman is concerned about the closure of magistrates courts, but such decisions are taken by local magistrates courts committees under legislation passed by the previous Conservative Government. As for the county courts, the strategy in the "Modernising the Civil Courts" Green Paper is aimed at increasing the number of places at which hearings can take place to increase the availability of local justice, not to close courts. The strategy is to develop local justice, not to restrict it.

Access to Justice (Macclesfield)

33. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What recent action the Lord Chancellor's Department has taken to improve access to justice in Macclesfield; and if she will make a statement. [159322]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Jane Kennedy): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a statement, but it might take me a little time, as we have been extremely busy in improving access to justice in Macclesfield.

The Cheshire community legal service partnership, which covers the Macclesfield area, has been formed to improve access to legal information and advice throughout the county. In Cheshire, the first phase of the project to have a single, national, standard computer system in magistrates courts was delivered in February 2001. A private finance initiative project is in the pipeline. In the county courts in Macclesfield—as elsewhere in England and Wales—the court service is examining how best to use modern technology to improve and increase access outside the traditional court environment.

Mr. Winterton: As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) flattered the Minister, may I do the same and thank her for that extremely helpful reply? However, she knows that if justice is to be effective, it needs to be local. She talks about a private finance initiative project for a new magistrates court in Macclesfield. Will she give a commitment today that that is part of a firm plan, subject to all authorities agreeing, and that we will have a new magistrates court in Macclesfield to serve the town and the surrounding area?

Jane Kennedy: The details of the project are still being considered. It would be wrong to give a commitment at this stage to proposals before I have been able to consider them. However, I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's comments, as I will to the representations that I know that he will make in future.

Rural Magistrates Courts

34. **Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): If she will make a statement on the impact of the Human Rights Act 1998 on rural magistrates courts. [159323]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Jane Kennedy): Data provided by the magistrates courts committees in the period October to December last year show that there has been no significant impact so far on the operation of the magistrates courts as a result of the Human Rights Act.

Mr. Paterson: What an absurd reply! Five years ago, £350,000 was spent modernising the old school buildings in Oswestry. The court now faces a bill of £197,450 to make it compliant with the Human Rights Act. Every time I ask the Minister where the money should come from, she says that it is down to the magistrates courts committee. That is rubbish. The cost is being forced on local magistrates by central Government. Will she explain why the Government will not stump up the money?

Jane Kennedy: Many smaller or remote magistrates courts lack suitable facilities. The standard of accommodation and facilities provided in a court is only one of a number of factors that magistrates courts committees consider. The Human Rights Act has had very little bearing on those considerations. Setting aside the hon. Gentleman's pre-election hysteria, the answer to his question is simple and straightforward: the prophets of doom who predicted that the implementation of the Human Rights Act would bring chaos to the courts have been proved wrong. That is due to two years of careful preparation by the Government and the courts. The smooth incorporation of the European convention on human rights into United Kingdom law in the form of the Human Rights Act 1998 has been a major achievement of the Government and it is one of which I am very proud.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The President of the Council was asked—

Oral Questions

42. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If she will bring forward proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on the procedure for the tabling of oral questions. [159331]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping): Not at present. The Procedure Committee has considered the matter many times. I am pleased to say that Mr. Speaker has responded to the recommendations in its most recent report by extending the deadline for tabling oral questions to 6.30 pm on a trial basis.

Mr. Bercow: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's characteristically mellifluous and soothing reply. Given the worrying growth of government by remote control and the new extended deadline of 6.30 pm for the tabling of oral questions, will he comprehensively rubbish the idea of tabling questions by e-mail and agree instead that Members who wish to table questions can reasonably be expected to continue to bestir themselves to plod along the corridors of the Palace of Westminster until they reach the Table Office to do so?

Mr. Tipping: There is no need to plod very far. There are no plans for the tabling of questions by e-mail or fax.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Why do we not do away with the tabling of questions and take a leaf out of the book of the Canadian House of Commons, where questioners are chosen exclusively by the Speaker? The debate is spontaneous, the whole Ministry is present and it stops the planted question. In addition, Ministers from the other place should attend this House to answer questions, and vice versa. It is nonsense for Ministers to come here and pretend that they know the answers when they do not. Ministers should answer for themselves. If Gus Macdonald is made a Cabinet Minister, I want him answering questions here.

Mr. Tipping: I must confess that I am surprised that my hon. Friend knows anything about planted questions, because he is a man of integrity and comes up with his questions himself. My right hon. Friend in the Lords, whom my hon. Friend mentioned, is already a Minister. There were abuses in the past, but the present system of tabling questions in person seems to protect the House from any abuse.

Executive Accountability

43. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): What steps she proposes to take to improve the ability of the House to hold the Executive to account. [159332]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I propose to continue the experimental sittings in Westminster Hall, which have given Back Benchers more than double the number of daytime Adjournment debates and increased fourfold opportunities to debate Select Committee reports. Those steps must be seen alongside other steps in the extension of scrutiny that have already been made. They include broadening the remit of the European Scrutiny Committee, setting up a Select Committee on Environmental Audit and a Joint Committee on Human Rights, agreeing to the Procedure Committee's proposals for the improved scrutiny of treaties and increasing the opportunities for pre-legislative scrutiny.

Mr. Brady: Given the strength of support from Members on both sides of the House for the implementation of the Liaison Committee report "Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive", is it not a sign of the contempt in which the Government hold the House of Commons that we have been denied a free vote on that report in this Parliament?

Mrs. Beckett: No, that is nonsense. The report has been debated, as the hon. Gentleman correctly said. He is right that many Members support the proposals in the report, but many other Members have great reservations about many of the proposals. On how the issues can be thrashed out, I point out that they have been debated and no doubt they will be discussed again.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will have considered the way in which the Opposition have conducted their business this Session. If she is Chairman of the Modernisation Committee in the new Parliament, could she not propose that the Opposition use their time far more effectively instead of engaging in time wasting? They would then be able to carry out their function of scrutiny, about which they protest so much.

Mrs. Beckett: There is some justice in my hon. Friend's remarks. I hope very much that the Conservative party will have the benefit of a few more years in which to build up its experience of opposition. Given its propensity to knee-jerk reaction to any proposals of the type that have been mentioned, that is sorely needed so that it can effectively use the time of the House for scrutiny. The Opposition attempt to do and say anything that they hope will embarrass the Government as opposed to considering what will be workable and to the advantage of the House as a whole.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The Lord President will know that the Opposition have committed themselves to a number of important reforms in this area. Can she assure us that, when Parliament is dissolved, the Labour party will also go into the next election fizzing with new ideas about how this place can hold the Government to account and seeking to reverse the damage that it has done in the past four years?

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the Conservative party is committed to a number of reforms. It had 18 years to implement many of them, but it utterly failed to do so. I assure him that we keep under review the proposals that have been made. If we are returned to power, we hope to build on the improvements and the greater availability of scrutiny from which the House has already benefited.

Programme Motions

44. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): What representations she has received about programme motions for legislation. [159333]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): A number of Conservative Members have continued to oppose any use of programme motions, but I believe that many Members consider that the Sessional Orders do not go far enough. Refinements to the present experimental procedures have been suggested by the Modernisation Committee in its first report of this Session.

Mrs. Campbell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Has she had time to analyse the points that have been made during programme motion debates? Does she agree that they tend to be repetitive and that we should consider whether those programme motions are really necessary?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important point. She takes a close interest in those matters, so I am sure that she knows that that issue was discussed by the Modernisation Committee and lay behind the production of our most recent report, which commanded support across the Committee and from all parties. Sadly, however, on this occasion, that support was not unanimous.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the right hon. Lady accept that Conservative Members have opposed programme motions because they are guillotines in disguise and were introduced without regard for the nature or complexity of the Bills in question and without any proper consultation with the Opposition? In fact, they are a disgraceful treatment of Parliament.

Mrs. Beckett: No, I am afraid I do not accept any of those points.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the matter is not one that should be debated on a party basis? The quality of the scrutiny that legislation receives ought to be important for the House of Commons. Is it not a sad commentary that the cumulative effect of many changes has been to remove better scrutiny? The suggestion that somehow programme motions should be debated without talking about programming shows a sad want of understanding of what happens in the House.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend has from the beginning expressed opposition to the experiment. She is right that different points of view exist on both sides of the House. However, I simply repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). There was support from all parties for the Modernisation Committee's most recent report. It is by no means insignificant that the present and past Chairs of the Select Committee on Procedure, both of whom are experienced, supported it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): While supporting the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in her desire to achieve better scrutiny in the House, may I ask the Leader of the House whether she will guarantee that the recommendations of the recently issued first report of the Modernisation Committee—which she chairs—will be implemented? She will be aware that there was some cross-party support for the report, not least from me, because the way in which we introduce programming is not working, as she knows. It is vital that the recommendations and guidance of the Modernisation Committee are implemented at an early stage of the next Parliament, whichever party is in government.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify the fact that, to a certain extent, there is an understanding. Although I would not venture to agree with the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), I accept that we have all been learning from the initial experiment and that improvements can be made to achieve genuinely better opportunities for scrutiny. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) will be the first to remind me that it is not for me to say what the House will decide, but I take his point that the House should have an opportunity to pronounce on the recommendations of the most recent report of the Modernisation Committee and that, as always, that should be done on a free vote.

Modernisation

46. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What further proposals she plans to put before the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons. [159335]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The Modernisation Committee has already instigated radical experiments with Westminster Hall, programming and deferred Divisions. I expect the Committee's major task to be monitoring those experiments, although we continue to discuss other issues, such as the use of electronic voting.

Mr. Swayne: That is regrettable. The right hon. Lady will be aware that many Labour Members are exhausted by the pace of reform, particularly the late night sittings to which, perversely, it has given rise. Can we not all have a rest from that business?

Mrs. Beckett: I think that the notion that the reforms have created greater difficulties instead of easing some of them is not wholly shared. Of course, I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, although I note that he, like other Members, has taken advantage of the new opportunities in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many Labour Members thoroughly welcome the modernisation process? Those of us who were first elected in 1997 still find it bemusing that, while it would be an act of treason if the IRA or the Ulster Volunteer Force put a drug in the water supply of the House of Commons to ensure that Ministers were tired, irritable and unable to concentrate through lack of sleep, until we fully modernise the House, we have made sleep deprivation a constitutional requirement.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I merely say to him what I have often said in other debates in this House: people are rarely more eloquent in the early hours of the morning, although unfortunately, all too often, they think they are.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): May I put it to the Leader of the House that one thing that should not be modernised is the opportunity for individual Members of Parliament to raise individual cases in this House and with Ministers in other ways? As an example, I hope that we will maintain the opportunity for me to raise the case of a constituent who has been asked to wait 15 months for an appointment at a hospital. For all the legislation that we have, for all the glitz and the glamour, each Member of Parliament must fight to ensure that our national health service is not a national waiting service.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman uses the opportunity skilfully to raise a slightly different point. Of course he is right that individual Members of Parliament must always have the facility to raise cases of the kind to which he refers. Indeed, many of us raised them frequently—much more frequently than is necessary today—during the years in which his party was in power.

Pay and Allowances

48. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What her policy is on the recommendations of the Review Body on Senior Salaries relating to the pay of hon. Members and the office costs allowance. [159338]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): Decisions on the recommendations are a matter for the House.

Mr. Winterton: As, the right hon. Lady says, such decisions are indeed a matter for the House. However, when will the recommendations be put to the House so that it can take a decision? Members in all parts of the House believe that the recommendations should be considered, and that such consideration should take place in this Parliament and not the next.

Mrs. Beckett: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I know that his view is shared in other parts of the House. He asks me when the recommendations will be debated. All I can say, as I would characteristically for a business question, is that it will not, I fear, be next week.

Transbus International

3.31 pm

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

the major announcement by TransBus International plc, formerly Plaxton Coach and Bus at Eastfield, Scarborough, on Thursday 3 May to make 700 redundancies and to withdraw the operations of the company from my constituency.

The Eastfield plant has long had a reputation for producing the best-quality coaches and buses in the world. The work force are highly skilled and make a significant contribution not only to the Scarborough local economy but to the national economy. If the factory closes for good, not only will 700 Plaxton workers lose their livelihood but the wider community and economy of Scarborough and North Yorkshire will be forced to terminate the employment of the people at the plant as well as that of suppliers, sub-contractors and people who work in professional and business services.

Early estimates of the damage to the Scarborough economy indicate that £50 million each year will be lost as a result of one in every 20 workers losing their jobs. At a stroke, Scarborough is becoming the worst unemployment black spot in Yorkshire and the Humber. The decision leaves us 42 miles from any potential alternative employment.

On Thursday evening, our confidence was broken and the community felt on the edge of bankruptcy. By Friday afternoon, however, thanks to the rapid response of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and my hon. Friend the Minister for Competitiveness, we had a glimmer of hope.

I believe that this matter deserves urgent attention in the House now, to ensure that the fullest attention of Parliament can be given to this important regional and national matter. The voice of Parliament needs to be heard. The matter is specific to the national debate on Britain's economic performance, as the likelihood is that foreign competitors will steal the important contribution that Plaxton has made to supplying coaches for Britain and the world.

The implications for the balance of payments are unacceptable and draconian. May we have a debate, Mr. Speaker, if not today, then in the near future?

Mr. Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Member has said and I must give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider the matter that he has raised appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24, and I cannot, therefore, submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

3.35 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister has just announced that the date of the general election will be 7 June. Given the grave events in Northern Ireland today, have you received any requests from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for the opportunity to speak to us? You will be aware that it has been stated that the leader of the Ulster Unionist party will resign if decommissioning does not start by July. No. 10 Downing street has already said that that would be a grave move with regard to the peace process. Have you received any request from the Secretary of State to come and speak to us today?

Mr. Speaker: The answer is no.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Further to the announcement made outside the House by the Prime Minister about a quarter of an hour ago—as it happens, it was made in my constituency—I have two questions. First, have you requested that either the Prime Minister or anybody else should make a formal announcement to Parliament about the Government's intentions? Is it not more appropriate that the announcement should be made here, rather than in any school, however good it or the constituency in which it is situated may be? Secondly, do you have any indication of when the Leader of the House will inform us of the statement's implications for our business? Should she not make such a statement at the first available opportunity?

Mr. Speaker: It is a matter for the Prime Minister to decide where he makes the statement regarding the general election. The hon. Gentleman is a very fortunate man; it was 1964 when I last had a Prime Minister in my constituency. On his other question, I can tell him that I understand that the Leader of the House is coming to the House at approximately 7 o'clock this evening to make a statement. I hope that that is helpful to him.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the general election has been announced and the Leader of the House is coming to the Dispatch Box to make a statement, and in light of the fact that many businesses in our constituencies have been blighted by foot and mouth, whether they are involved in farming or in tourism, will you encourage the Leader of the House to make time before Parliament is dissolved for a statement to be made by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or the Minister in charge of the rural affairs taskforce? Such a statement is needed to ensure that constituents who have been directly affected by the foot and mouth blight may know during the election period about the assistance that they can get. They cannot wait another four weeks until the election is over.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Ministers concerned.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have tried to give notice of this point

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

of order, even though I did so a relatively short time ago. During this Parliament, a number of complaints have been referred by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to the Standards and Privileges Committee. Are you concerned that those complaints do not seem to have been dealt with with the firmness that was applied to similar complaints made during the previous Parliament? Most recently, such a complaint has led to the censuring of a former Minister, but there is no proposal to inflict any punishment for three months, which ensures that the general election will be left way behind. Are you satisfied that the Committee is doing its work properly, bearing in mind the importance of ensuring that a Labour-dominated Committee in seen to be properly impartial when Labour Members appear before it?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for the Committee and also for the House. It is not a matter for the Speaker.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As a member of the Standards and Privileges Committee, I stress that every report in this Parliament has been unanimous. That was not the case in the previous Parliament.

Discrimination Against Older People

3.39 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make discrimination against older people unlawful; to provide for the creation of an Age Discrimination Council; and for connected purposes.

Discrimination on the ground of age has attracted growing attention in recent years. Indeed, it has also attracted increasing popularity as a topic for ten-minute Bills. Less than a fortnight ago, on 25 April, my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) sought leave to introduce a Bill to establish an age equality commission to advise the Government on discrimination against older people. He also did that in July of last year. A fortnight ago, the House agreed the Question without a Division.

Tomorrow, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) will seek leave to bring in a Bill to make some provisions with regard to age discrimination. I do not know what they are, but taken with other initiatives, that suggests that there is substantial support in the House for further action on the subject. Perhaps that is not surprising given the age diversity in this place, where hon. Members' ages range from the early 20s to the 80s. I am sure that we all agree that that diversity is welcome.

Most hon. Members' minds are currently on the forthcoming general election. Nowadays, national campaigning organisations tend to produce manifestos. I should briefly like to draw hon. Members' attention to Age Concern's manifesto, entitled, "Dignity, Security, Opportunity". It is an excellent document both for its clarity and the strength of its arguments. It expresses one of its five priorities in the following words:

"ending discrimination against older people—by law—in work, health, public services and the consumer market".

That is precisely what my Bill seeks to do.

Many other organisations also campaign on age discrimination. LEAD—the Lobby to End Age Discrimination—held a seminar in the Palace of Westminster in November last year. Like many hon. Members, I was pleased to sponsor and participate in it. Representatives from the three Front Benches contributed productively to it. Another organisation, the Association of Retired and Persons over 50, drafted the Bill that I want to introduce today.

What would the Bill do? It would make discrimination against older people unlawful, for example, in employment, access to health care, education and training, credit and other goods and services. It would set up an age discrimination council to advise the Government on detailed codes of practice. The provisions are similar to those in existing anti-discrimination legislation.

Why is it necessary? Many people over 50 have difficulties in finding a job, even when they have extensive qualifications and enormous experience. Some, because of their age, have difficulty in obtaining credit, hiring a car or gaining access to other services on fair terms.

Many of my constituents are convinced that they are discriminated against because they are older. They stress that point whenever I meet the local branch of Age Concern, the South Gloucestershire Senior Citizens Forum, or other pensioners' groups, as I frequently do.

Age discrimination has moved up the political agenda and it is not difficult to understand why. First, the population of our country is growing older. There are approximately 20 million people aged 50 and over in the United Kingdom, representing 40 per cent. of the adult population. Consequently, older people realise that they have growing political influence and they rightly want their opinions to be taken into account.

Secondly, there is growing evidence of widespread age discrimination. In its recent evidence to the Education and Employment Committee—which I congratulate on producing a very good report on age discrimination in employment—the Department for Education and Employment drew attention to a survey conducted six months after the code of practice on age diversity had been introduced. The survey found that one in five older people believed that they had been discriminated against in their current job or in a job application simply because of their age. Discrimination was most likely to be reported in the area of recruitment, in which 12 per cent. of older people felt that their age was the key factor militating against them when applying for jobs.

The Department for Education and Employment has also pointed out that many people leaving work before reaching the state pension age have not done so voluntarily, and in the past 20 years the employment rate among those over 50 has fallen dramatically. In 1979, 84 per cent. of men between 50 years old and retirement age were in employment. By 1997, that figure had fallen to 67 per cent. By last year, it had risen modestly to 69 per cent., owing to the substantial increase in employment under the present Government. Nevertheless, it is clear from the trend over the past 20 years that older people who wish to work are increasingly being denied that opportunity.

A further reason why age discrimination is attracting increasing attention is simply that it differs from other forms of discrimination in one important respect: there is no law against it, as there is for discrimination on the grounds of race, gender or disability. It is perfectly possible for an employer to refuse someone a job, promotion or training, not because of his or her ability, but because of his or her age.

The Government have, of course, taken some action to address this problem, and are, indeed, the first Government to take the issue seriously. In 1999, a voluntary code of practice on age diversity in employment was introduced, and last year the Government welcomed the EU directive on equal treatment in employment that will introduce legislation to outlaw this kind of discrimination in employment by 2006. Legislation to tackle age discrimination in employment within five years is better than no commitment at all, but five years is a long time to wait—and what about discrimination in areas other than employment?

Discrimination on the ground of age, like any other form of discrimination, is wrong. To deny people employment or access to services for no reason other than their age is unacceptable and robs us of the enormous economic and social benefits of age diversity. In my view, legislation to tackle age discrimination is required as soon as possible. I hope that the House will support that view this afternoon.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Roger Berry, Valerie Davey, Mr. Paul Flynn, Dr. Ashok Kumar, Ms Linda Perham, Mr. Lawrie Quinn, Mr. Andrew Dismore, Mr. David Winnick and Ann Clwyd.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST OLDER PEOPLE

Mr. Roger Berry accordingly presented a Bill to make discrimination against older people unlawful; to provide for the creation of an Age Discrimination Council; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May, and to be printed [Bill 95].

Finance Bill [*Ways and Means*]

3.49 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move,

Limited liability partnerships

That provision may be made in the Finance Bill about limited liability partnerships.

The resolution covers measures that build on and clarify the tax rules introduced by the Limited Liability Partnership Act 2000. First, the measures amplify the rules that provide for limited liability partnerships to be treated as partnerships for tax purposes so as to remove doubts over how the rules might operate in certain circumstances, such as liquidation of the limited liability partnership. The clause confirms the guidelines published in December, which were widely welcomed. Secondly, they prevent tax loss when a limited liability partnership carries on the business of making investments, particularly property investments.

The substantive measures will apply from 6 April 2001, the date on which businesses could first incorporate as limited liability partnerships under the Limited Liability Partnership Act 2000. A measure to prevent capital gains tax loss will apply from 3 May, the day on which these clauses were published.

3.50 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): This is a somewhat surreal event, not least because our discussion is due to be repeated in Committee in not many minutes' time. We shall reserve our substantive points—which, I am glad to say, are not deep or wide—for that debate. We understand that the measure is essentially intended to create fiscal neutrality as between partnerships that have limited liability and partnerships that do not, which strikes us as a perfectly reasonable principle.

I hope the Financial Secretary will not think it ungenerous of me to say that it is slightly regrettable that we are debating the proposal at such a breakneck pace. I do not suggest for a moment that anyone else might not have got into the same difficulty; nevertheless, I harbour a doubt, or worry. I fear that, in a few months, we shall all wake up one morning and realise that an aspect of the Finance Bill—perhaps more than one, quite apart from the aggregates tax, which we already know is loathsome—was ineptly or improperly enacted, conceivably against the wishes of Ministers, simply because we had such a short time in which to grapple with the details.

There must be some way in which a parliamentary democracy as old and experienced as ours can devise mechanisms to avoid having to deal with a Finance Bill so rapidly just before a general election. I suspect that whichever party finds itself on whichever side of the House after the election may have cause to rue the speed of our proceedings.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): This is a truly fascinating matter, and I share the concern cautiously expressed by my hon. Friend about the circumscription of debate on it. Does my hon. Friend agree, however, that it is important for us to know what representations, and how many, the Government have received about what might prove to be an innocuous measure, in order to kill stone dead any notion that a cynic—obviously not me—might have that it is merely the brainchild of that distinguished group of people known as the Treasury anoraks?

Mr. Letwin: My hon. Friend has had such a reputation for eloquence and coherence in the current Parliament that it is hardly necessary for me to say how much I admired both the length of his sentence and his perfect articulation of it. As far as we are able to determine, the industry in this case—or rather, the range of industries in which partnerships prevail in this case—has been consulted, and is broadly content with the proposals.

Conservative Members have had serious difficulties with many aspects of many Finance Bills produced by this Government—and, as I said earlier, with the aggregates tax in the Bill that we are discussing. Our objections, however, have never been directed towards those whom my hon. Friend calls the Treasury anoraks. Treasury and Inland Revenue officials have done a magnificent job in dealing with the inordinately difficult business of trying to translate the Government's wildly over-ambitious taxing plans into practice, in a series of dizzying Finance Bills. They deserve our sympathy and admiration. We just hope that, in future, after the general election, we shall have the opportunity to spare them from such activities—by reducing rather than increasing the tax burden, and by reducing rather than increasing the ingenuity and complexity of tax legislation. As I said, however, the specific provision that we are debating does not fall into any of these latter lamentable categories.

When everyone has had time to examine the details of this Finance Bill at more leisure, and if we find that there are serious lacunae, I hope that, together, whichever of us find ourselves on the Treasury Bench after the general election, we shall be able to cure those deficiencies. We certainly have not had the time that was due before the general election to do that.

I shall not detain the House further on the provision. As I said, slightly later today, in Committee, we shall return to the substance of the details of the limited liability partnerships new clause.

3.55 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I had conduct of the Limited Liability Partnership Act 2000 during its progress in the House. The Government were represented in those debates by a Department of Trade and Industry Minister, the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, and it is good to have a Treasury Minister to discuss the provision today on the Floor of the House.

I have always been assured that the principle is that limited liability partnerships are taxed in pretty much the same manner as existing partnerships. Nevertheless, I should like to make a few detailed points on the taxation of limited liability partnerships. I am doing so now, as I may not have an opportunity to do so later today, in Committee.

First and foremost, the Financial Secretary will recall that, in the Finance Act 1998, changes were made to prevent firms that were on the cash basis from staying on the cash basis. There was a transitional period of about eight years, I believe, in which cash-basis firms would go on to a full-earnings basis. Many of those firms, or at least some of them, will become limited liability partnerships in that eight-year transitional period. It would be good to hear the Financial Secretary confirm that, if they do become limited liability partnerships in that eight-year transitional period, the transitional relief will continue.

Secondly, I should like to have the Minister's confirmation on the attribution of capital gains and losses. Will he confirm that, even in cases of liquidation, the members of a limited liability partnership will be subject to capital gains tax in accordance with their beneficial interests in the assets disposed of, rather than their shares in the limited liability partnership?

The third point concerns statements of practice and extra-statutory concessions, some of which currently apply to existing partnerships. I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that those extra-statutory concessions and those statements of practice will apply to limited liability partnerships just as they apply to existing partnerships.

In relation to a statement of practice, for example, although it may be an extra-statutory concession, assets may be owned by members of a limited liability partnership—perhaps by one member of the limited liability partnership, or by two members if the partnership consists of more than two members, and so forth—and leased to the limited liability partnership. Will the Minister confirm that those assets will count as business or agricultural property for purposes of 100 per cent. inheritance tax relief? Will he also confirm that the assets will count as business property for purposes of capital gains tax roll-over relief, for example?

I realise that those points are relatively esoteric. I join my colleague the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) in saying that we should very much have liked to have an opportunity today, either in Committee or on the Floor of the House, for a detailed debate on the tax aspects of limited liability partnerships. Nevertheless, I have flagged up three or four important points which will affect the commercial judgment of individuals who are considering entering into limited liability partnerships. I look forward to hearing the comments of the Financial Secretary on the points that I have made, either when he responds today or perhaps at a later date.

4 pm

Mr. Timms: The House will be aware that we need to agree the resolution in order to allow for a debate in Committee later. I hope that it will be possible to have a discussion of some of the points that have been raised in the brief debate that we have just had. I am grateful to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) for his tribute to the technical skills with which this and previous Finance Bills have been enacted during this Parliament. I agree with him about that. I can reassure him that this particular matter and new clauses 16 and 17 have been well considered. The intention to proceed with these matters was set out in paragraph 3.53 of the pre-Budget report last November. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that they did not cause much consternation then or since, and we have had a number of discussions and taken account of representations.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) asked me to confirm the principles that we are applying here, comparing the tax position of ordinary partnerships with limited liability partnerships. As we said in the pre-Budget report sent out on 8 November last year, in general, limited liability partnerships will be treated as partnerships for tax purposes and there has been no change in that policy. These measures expand and clarify the rules put in place by the Limited Liability Partnership Act—as he said, the hon. Gentleman served on the Standing Committee considering that Bill. Limited liability partnerships also prevent tax loss through investment and property investment, as announced in the pre-Budget report and confirmed in the Budget in March; so I do not think that there are any surprises here.

On the other point that the hon. Gentleman raised, I hope that he will catch the eye of the Chairman in the relevant Standing Committee and that there will be the opportunity for a discussion that will be expertly dealt with by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General.

Mr. Burnett: I am extremely grateful. The reason I raised these points on the Floor of the House is that I am serving on two Standing Committees concurrently and I can only be in one place at a time. If by any chance I am unable to catch the Chairman's eye in the Standing Committee considering the Finance Bill, I hope that someone from the Treasury will reply to the points that I have raised.

Mr. Timms: I shall be glad to provide a written response to the hon. Gentleman on those points.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

Limited Liability Partnerships

That provision may be made in the Finance Bill about limited liability partnerships.

Orders of the Day

Private Security Industry Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 4

COMPLAINTS

'( ) Any person who has cause to complain of the conduct of a private security operative or approved contractor may lodge a written complaint to the Authority on the following grounds:

(a) that an operative or approved contractor has been convicted of a crime;

(b) that an operative or approved contractor has breached a provision of this Act or any regulations made under this Act;

(c) that an operative or approved contractor has been guilty of negligence or misconduct in the course to which the operative or approved contractor is licensed or approved;

(d) that the operative or approved contractor has breached the provisions of a code of conduct published by the Authority.'.—*[Mr. Bruce George.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.3 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Based on my reading of the debate in another place and on having served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill, I am supremely confident that the Minister will not accept my new clause. I certainly understand the reasons for his reticence, which is due mainly to the fact that time is running out. Some weeks ago, I had to decide whether half a loaf was better than none; after some agonising, I decided on half a loaf—with the possibility of its dramatic expansion. I am not a cook, but there is always the possibility that, with careful nurturing and cooking, bread will expand. I hope that in time there will be more legislation.

There are one two gaps in the Bill, to put it mildly. New clause 4 would introduce a complaints procedure and enable the regulatory authority to establish a complaints committee. I hope that the need for that is self-evident, even if the proposal is not accepted. When the authority is set up, it will draft its working procedures and embark on an extensive process of consultation, which I am sure will show that a complaints committee has a place in the authority's committee structure.

My hopes that a similar provision would be included in the Bill were dashed, but the omission is not disastrous. The need for a complaints procedure is pretty clear, as there are an infinite number of possible causes for complaint. For example, an hon. Member might be duffed up by a security guard or badly advised by a private investigator; or his daughter might tell him that drugs were being distributed in a night club by a firm of bouncers in league with drug distributors; or a security guard who purported to be licensed might not be. The new clause lists other examples, and it would be superfluous to add to them.

Only part of the security industry will be regulated. The industry has been open to enormous criticism, much of it unfounded, but there has been no one to complain to. To whom can one complain in the period before the Bill is enacted? I have no idea, and suspect that very few people know. There are many self-regulatory bodies, and people can seek advice about which one can help. No doubt those bodies have a complaints procedure, but the overwhelming majority of companies in the private security industry belong to none of those regulatory bodies.

Let us take the example of a person who wants to complain about the firm that installed his alarm, but discovers that it does not belong to the British Security Industry Association or any other body. Where does he lodge his complaint? Should he turn to the local consumer protection department? Should he write a letter of complaint to the editor of a newspaper, or resort to a lawyer in an attempt to secure a legal claim against the company? The process is a patchwork and does not work.

Do the trade associations with a self-regulatory structure have teeth? How many firms have they slung out for breaching the rules? If recourse is had to the criminal courts, it will be difficult to secure evidence, and the case will be protracted.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In terms of the otherwise admirable construction of new clause 4, I am a little perturbed by what seems to be the mistaken insertion of "to" in the second line of subsection (c). Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to substitute "of" for "to"? If the answer is no, can he enlighten me as to the purport of that subsection?

Mr. George: I had not spotted that. I shall look at the new clause carefully and, after the hon. Gentleman speaks, I will, with the approval of the Chair, intervene to correct any mistake.

When the industry is properly regulated, it will still produce a large number of complaints. I do not want to encourage frivolous complaints—if the regulatory authority feels that a complaint is frivolous or vexatious, it may not wish to proceed with it—and I do not want to establish a vast bureaucracy, but the complaints committee should be distant from the main body of the regulatory authority to give it a degree of independence.

The industry will metamorphose to achieve the standards that will be laid down and built upon by subordinate legislation. Many of the complaints that are inherent in the current process will become redundant and the industry will become more professional. Companies will become better; they will realise that their cards are to be marked and that if they commit misdemeanours or criminal acts they run the risk of having their licence withdrawn.

I hope that a code of practice will supplement the Bill's provisions. As I said in Committee, private security companies should not be the bases of campaign headquarters in any parliamentary election, as is the case in my constituency; that should not be within the scope of a security company's operations. A company should appear somewhat distant from the cut and thrust of an election.

I have no intention of boring the House with speeches of one hour and 20 minutes, as, regrettably, I did on Second Reading and in Committee. I am not a snooker player of any competence—my record break was nine, which included a black—but I know that a player must identify for the referee or opponent the pocket that he is aiming for; that is certainly the case in pool. Every time I speak from now on, I shall indicate the time I will take. I have spoken for less than 10 minutes in moving the new clause, without much expectation of success.

Mr. Bercow: The self-effacement of the right hon. Gentleman is legendary in this House, but I am bound to say that there is no justification for it. As he knows, and as I am happy to communicate to other hon. Members, I invariably find his speeches racy and intoxicating in equal measure. As we are in the dying embers of this Parliament, it is right that we should pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman. Not only is he a first-class Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence—a point on which I shall not expatiate, Mr. Speaker—but, more particularly, he is without question the foremost authority on the subject of the private security industry in this House. He and I enjoyed a chat on the subject the other day. He profited nothing from our exchange, but I profited a great deal.

4.15 pm

Mr. George: I caution the hon. Gentleman against further eulogies; otherwise, his speech may appear in my election material, and my opponent may complain to the party chairman. I urge him to refrain from further compliments if his future in his party is to be secured.

Mr. Bercow: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his protective hand, but, as he knows, I am a modest and self-effacing fellow and I know that I have a great future behind me and a great past in front of me. None the less, I appreciate his tender care.

The nub of the matter is accountability. I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman intends to press the motion to a vote, but if he does we are minded to support it. We are concerned to have a lever whereby we can ensure the effective accountability of private security operatives. I long ago gave up seeking to penetrate the inner recesses of ministerial minds, but the Minister might say, "Ah,' tis implicit. No one is arguing that these people should be able to operate without let or hindrance, with no requirement to be subject to scrutiny or assessment."

It is certainly the case that the granting of a licence to operate in the private security industry is not a blank cheque. For example, if an operative conducts himself inefficiently, or worse, is guilty of malfeasance or corruption, he is likely to be deprived of that licence. These matters were touched on briefly in Committee and I am well aware that the fact that someone is a licensed operative does not mean that he or she will always remain so, but the right hon. Gentleman has usefully highlighted what I might call the issue of transparency or, if I dare use a late 1980s term, glasnost.

I am an enthusiast for glasnost. Are we to know that there is a procedure for complaints? Will there be a procedure for public complaints? Will someone who is genuinely dissatisfied with or anxious about the performance of an operative's duties be able to go to the authority and express both the fact of and the grounds for that anxiety or dissatisfaction?

There is an analogy with the police complaints procedure. I am an enthusiast for the police, as Conservative Members are on almost all occasions and as Labour Members are periodically. There would be consensus in the House on the importance of having a complaints procedure, of its being clear and transparent and of people having the maximum opportunity to know about it and be able to use it.

We are talking about an embryonic regulatory regime that is being instituted very late in the day compared with those that are already up and running in other countries. People should know what their entitlements are.

I have not discussed new clause 4 with the right hon. Gentleman but I have read it several times, and his simple purpose seems to be to let people know that there is a chance to complain, to explain how they can do so and to guarantee that there is a more or less approved, regular and satisfactory method investigating those complaints. I do not want to embarrass the right hon. Gentleman any further than I have already done, but in this context, as I have had reason often to observe in others, the point that he makes is so blindingly obvious and sensible that only an extraordinarily clever person could fail to see it.

The Minister is an extraordinarily clever person. He is very important, very senior and very industrious, assiduous and ambitious—a man with many commitments and a full diary. I do not doubt that he will want to explain either why he agrees with the right hon. Gentleman and say that it was merely an occasional slip of memory that prevented him from including such a provision originally, or why, despite his brilliance, assiduity, dexterity and ambition, he is unwise enough to disagree with his senior colleague.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): I shall disappoint the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) by saying that his kind remarks will not be included in my election address, despite the advice of my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). There is an oleaginous quality to the hon. Gentleman that would not convince the discerning electors of Norwich, South to give weight to his judgment on such matters.

Mr. Bercow: I am genuinely taken aback by the Minister's comments. I do not want to prolong this exchange, Mr. Speaker, because you might become restive, and we do not want that to happen, but what I said in all seriousness about the right hon. Gentleman's expertise was very sincerely meant. I have long been an admirer of the right hon. Gentleman—frankly, since I came out of short trousers and observed politics from 1980 onwards. I am a trifle taken aback by what the Minister has said because although I have periodically been accused—unfairly, but I make no complaint—by Ministers and other Labour Members of being obnoxious, I have never been accused of being oleaginous.

Mr. Clarke: I was commenting on the hon. Gentleman's remarks about me. I completely accept that his comments about my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South were made in all seriousness. Indeed, I was going to make the same remark. Neither the House nor the Committee has been bored at any stage by my right hon. Friend's contributions because, in almost all circumstances, they have brought light to our proceedings. I say that genuinely, and he should not feel that he has bored anyone in any way.

[Mr. Clarke]

I want to say a word about the missing half loaf that my right hon. Friend mentioned. I support Norwich City football club and am one of its season ticket holders. I take my cooking advice from Delia Smith, who is the catering secretary of a small organisation called Canaries at Westminster, which supports Norwich City football club. I was interested in the right hon. Gentleman's remarks on cooking, and I think that he would agree that the missing half loaf in his assessment of the Bill falls into two categories.

One category is made up of the areas of genuine disagreement between himself and the Government about exactly how far and how fast to proceed. Such matters include, for example, which sectors of the industry should be regulated and which should not, and at what time, and some aspects of the regulatory regime, such as whether the industry should be regulated through a quango or directly. However, those genuine disagreements have been more about pace than about direction.

The other missing quarter of the loaf is made up of things that are implicit in the Bill, but are not made explicit. I suggest that new clause 4 deals with that aspect of the proposals, rather than with any difference of opinion, such as those that we have discussed in Committee, because we accept that the effective discharge of the authority's duties to license only fit and proper persons will inevitably mean that it will need to establish an effective complaints procedure against licence holders and/or approved contractors.

The authority will need to be able to listen to, and investigate complaints made against, anyone who seeks a licence in the first place, or who seeks to renew a licence. The views of the public and customers will be important in that regard. More widely, the authority's general duties to keep under review the industry, the operation of the licensing system and the legislation in general will again mean that it will need to keep its ear close to the ground so as to find out exactly how the legislation is operating. A complaints mechanism—and, indeed, a wider vehicle for other types of public comment, not just complaints—will be an important and necessary contribution to the authority's discharge of all those responsibilities.

The authority, like any other effective public body, will need to establish a complaints procedure for matters within its remit. I can give an assurance to my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South that the Government will build such a complaints procedure into planning to establish the authority. Furthermore, in the extremely unlikely event—so unlikely that it is not foreseeable—that an appropriate complaints mechanism were not set up by the authority, the Secretary of State could direct the authority under the provisions of clause 2 to establish one. I give an assurance on behalf of this Government—and the hon. Member for Buckingham implied the same on behalf of the Opposition—that such a direction would be issued by Government in such a case.

In keeping with the framework approach that we have adopted with the legislation, we do not, however, consider it necessary for such a requirement to appear in the Bill. It is important, but, as we discussed in Committee, our approach has been to focus on the outcomes that we want from the authority, rather than to over-prescribe the precise means by which they may be achieved.

Mr. Bercow: I think that we have had an assurance that the complaints procedure will apply all the time, and not only within the time-limited periods in which somebody is either applying for a licence or seeking renewal of it, but will the Minister confirm that he has ideas in mind for developing the complaints procedure, culled from the practice of other professional services? Can he offer us some inkling of those ideas?

Mr. Clarke: I can give the general assurance that the hon. Gentleman seeks that the complaints process will cover the range of complaints that could arise. We do not have in our back pocket a particular form for that process, but it will be culled from the best practice of similar national bodies to try to establish the best form for the complaints regime.

I urge my right hon. Friend to consider withdrawing his new clause. I give him the assurance that this Government will build a complaints procedure into our plans for establishing the authority. In the unlikely event that the authority does not establish an appropriate mechanism, the Secretary of State will be ready to direct it, under the provisions of clause 2, to establish such a procedure. To use even warmer words, I might say that we do not believe that such an authority could operate at all unless it operated an effective complaints procedure.

4.30 pm

Mr. Bruce George: I noted a slight altercation between my hon. Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). I would have liked to join in, but oleaginous is not a word that I use regularly. I have been called many things but never that by my constituents, and I suspect that most of them are as oblivious of the etymology of that word as I am. I shall look it up and if it is so abusive I shall belatedly come to the assistance of the hon. Gentleman.

Once an election has been called is not the best time to become a rebel, and I do not propose to divide the House. I have received assurances on the main points, although I remain sceptical about some earlier promises. The Minister will go on to higher things—I shall not say better things, because looking after the private security industry is a noble task. I certainly accept his assurances. I apologise for the slight error in the new clause; as the hon. Member for Buckingham pointed out, his knowledge of the English language is greater than mine—he actually knows what oleaginous means. Subsection (c) should state that the

"contractor has been guilty of negligence or misconduct in the course of which the operative or approved contractor is licensed or approved."

I hope that the record is clear.

With the assurances given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 5

REGULATION HARMONISATION COMMITTEE

'The Authority shall establish a regulation harmonisation committee with representatives from government departments and other relevant bodies for the purpose of developing and harmonising security standards.'.—*[Mr. Bruce George.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Bruce George: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

This is my second and final proposed change to the Bill. Under the new clause:

> "The Authority shall establish a regulation harmonisation committee with representatives from government departments and other relevant bodies".

In a similar proposal that was not selected for debate in the Standing Committee, I used the phrase "liaison committee". As I am a member of the Select Committee on Liaison, perhaps that was not the ideal wording. Perhaps the Liaison Committee would have thought that additional functions would be bestowed on it. I meant no confusion.

In the less than eight minutes available for my speech, I hope that my reason for proposing the new clause will be obvious. I have often been guilty of arguing that the private security industry—unlike almost every other industry in the world—is wholly unregulated and unaccountable. Strictly, that was and is true, as other people have also pointed out. However, the security industry is enormous, and only some of it has been brought within the orbit of this Bill. As much of the industry is outside as is inside—that is one of the main deficiencies of the measure.

Even more obvious to me, however, is the fact that a vast sector of the private security "industry" falls within the scope of the public sector. For example, probably as many people are engaged in physical guarding, investigation, installation and monitoring of equipment and information security in Departments, Government agencies and local government as in the private sector. An enormous number of public sector personnel have job descriptions almost identical to those in the sectors of private security that will eventually be covered by the measure.

In many countries, the public sector is subject to the same regulatory standards as the private sector. In all honesty, therefore, one must realise that the security industry is well entrenched in the public sector. The reality is that the Government regulate their own areas of competence extremely well; they look after the private security in their own orbit quite well. However, that does not mean that they are good payers. Until recently, some of the worst paid personnel in private security were employed in Departments.

Furthermore, I certainly would not argue with anyone who believes that security in the museum and art gallery sectors, for example, is infinitely superior to that in other sectors. I had a good friend who was a consultant. Despite my frequent protestations and pleadings for him to divulge the contents of a research project that he undertook on a particular museum, he would not go into any detail. However, he told me that the situation was truly appalling. He briefly mentioned that more people were engaged in guarding the museum, which is enclosed and closed for half the day, than there are policemen in my constituency or, indeed, the three constituencies that cover Walsall. He took the full secret to his grave.

I am not arguing that outside the private sector the activities that come within the scope of central and local government are infinitely better regulated. However, in some cases they are. Departments have tried to save for themselves precautions to prevent them from being open to the same criticism as the private sector. That sounds contradictory, but it is true. The Home Office has established statutory and mandatory standards. The privatisation of prisons and prison escorts was implemented alongside a tough regulatory framework set up by the Criminal Justice Act 1991. The standards of security in prisons are high, despite bad publicity, and outside the scope of regulation. The Guard Dogs Act 1975 provided powers, some of which have not been implemented. The Home Office employs in-house and contract security guards, and the in-house sector is certainly regulated.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has extensive statutory responsibilities for regulating security in respect of transport. The transport security division—Transec—is responsible for monitoring and enforcing regulations. Its role is to deliver secure public transport systems in accordance with United Kingdom legislation and international agreements, so all those people who fall within the scope of the Department's remit, such as the guards at Heathrow or Gatwick, are clearly subject to strict control and regulation. When I made a close study of Ministry of Defence security, I discovered that its police and guard service employ a variety of private security companies, so it, too, applies strong regulatory standards.

The Health and Safety Executive is responsible for much activity within the public and private sectors. Guidelines on leisure and entertainment are produced by Departments. They set the norms and are mandated in sports ground licences, safety certificates, occasional licences and contracts. The Department of Health, which has responsibility for a vast number of hospitals and other institutions, has laid down clear standards for the hiring of private security staff.

We should consider the role of central Government as a whole. Although I have not tabled parliamentary questions since the 1994-95 Session, it is possible to make a rough calculation based on the figures that were given for those years. I asked how much Departments had spent on security agencies, contract guards, in-house guards, private investigators, in-house investigators, security consultants and the purchase of security equipment. In 1994-95, the total cost of Departments' spending on private security and security agencies was more than £337 million.

Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Home Office plays an enormous role in funding closed circuit television and neighbourhood or community wardens—four such schemes have been funded in my area. It takes 20 days to train a community warden, and that training is infinitely superior to that carried out by almost any private security company. Organisations in central Government—such as the DETR, those in Northern Ireland, and nuclear and defence establishments—employ private security personnel according to different standards.

[Mr. Bruce George]

However, a variety of voluntary standards have been influenced by the Government. For example, the British Standards Institution, Securicor, the Security Industry Training Authority and the International Institution of Security all have different regulatory standards that apply to personnel and to equipment. Hovering in the background—too often, it comes into the foreground—is the better regulation taskforce and it, along with the other organisations, has an influence on security issues.

My new clause is designed to give the Home Office and the regulatory authorities food for thought. I wish to make it clear that they deal with just one part of the private security industry. Other Departments have regulatory authority, and other standards—albeit voluntary—apply particularly to security equipment. I suggest to the regulatory authorities that there should be a committee or some form of grand summit—that may sound rather pompous—that involves the Home Office, regulatory authorities, local government associations and other Departments. The aim should not be to standardise procedures, because that is not possible. However, we should at least try to make the different sectors of the security industry—contract, in-house and those within and without the scope of regulation—aware of what the others are doing through a regular exchange of information.

If my hon. Friend the Minister shocks us all by accepting the new clause, I hope that the Home Office and other Departments will give serious consideration to the practices of a whole range of bodies, many of which I have not mentioned. Although harmonisation is not feasible, we should at least ensure that the guards employed directly by the Home Office or the Foreign Office are subject to similar standards. Consultation is important, and much of the industry will fall outside the regulations. Therefore, the influence of the public sector is important in ensuring that the different organisations meet each other with the aim of achieving a greater degree of commonality than has hitherto existed.

I do not know whether I have spoken for more than 10 minutes, and apologise if I have. None the less, I have pleasure in moving the new clause.

4.45 pm

Mr. Bercow: I am not certain whether the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) has got it right in new clause 5. I have not reached a conclusion on that point, but it is important for right hon. and hon. Members to understand the gravamen of his concern which, I believe, he highlighted on Second Reading initially, and certainly in the enjoyable and stimulating debates that we had in Committee.

The right hon. Gentleman is concerned that, either by an error of commission or—more likely, I suspect, if we follow what might be described as the cock-up theory—by error of omission, the Government may not provide a consistent regulatory framework. The principle of consistency and commonality has run through his contributions on that point. Whether one is an advocate of big or, to put it another way, heavy regulation of the private security industry or, by contrast, an advocate of small regulation or what might be called the light-touch approach, one can nevertheless form an alliance, which may even be an unholy alliance, in support of a consistent approach.

I do not mind conceding to the House that I am a little worried by the reference in the right hon. Gentleman's new clause to "a regulation harmonisation committee", not because I suspect his motives but because I am suspicious of committees. That is the reality of the matter; I am a little alarmed about a new committee emerging. Notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's best endeavours to ensure the contrary, a committee under the tutelage of the Minister would be pregnant with peril. My anxiety on that point is not intense, because I do not expect the Minister to chair any committee in the near future in a ministerial capacity, but there is an inherent tendency for regulation, once established, to increase.

I am sure that it will not have escaped your beady eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, in the debate that we had a few moments ago, I referred to the potential for read-across between the new clauses and other pieces of legislation that the House has digested on previous occasions. To explain my point about regulation, I should like to pray in aid the wise words of my noble Friend Lord Biffen who, over many years, has uttered many wise words on many subjects.

When I was taking my A-levels in 1981, I well recall that the then Chief Secretary and right hon. Member for Oswestry—as John Biffen then was—lamented publicly the difficulty of controlling public expenditure and said:

> "You have to run very fast to stand still."

There is an analogy with regulation: to keep regulation at a reasonable level at which it is effective, but not burdensome, discipline and fixity of purpose are required. I—and, I very much hope, the right hon. Member for Walsall, South—do not want a committee to have the ambition to increase regulation exponentially. If the committee had a tightly defined remit—I would be more confident if its remit were drafted by the right hon. Member for Walsall, South than by the Minister of State—which was confined to consistency between one sector of the private security industry and another, that might augur well and my initial scepticism about the committee might be reconsidered. However, we do not know—although I imagine that we shall shortly discover—whether the Minister of State has any enthusiasm for the right hon. Gentleman's proposed harmonisation committee.

We need to touch briefly on a number of issues because they are conceptually different from each other and should be treated separately. The first is the form of the regulation—I was tempted to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman on this, but I was enjoying his speech so much that I decided not to—and the procedures that govern the regulation of one sector of the private security industry and another. I was anxious to discover whether the kernel of the right hon. Gentleman's argument was a worry about inconsistent practice and procedure between one sector and another, and that some sectors of the industry would be more rigorously scrutinised and held to account than others.

A separate, but no less significant, issue is whether there would be more exacting training requirements in one sector than in another. There is a stronger argument for absolute consistency in relation to the issue about form than there is in relation to standards of training or qualification. The reason is obvious. Whether we are regulating the work of man guards—or, for the edification of the politically correct classes, perhaps I should say person guards—or are concerned with those who are engaged, through their private security work, in intelligence gathering, the principle that there should be clear procedures before deciding whether someone is bona fide, and legitimate and should be granted a licence should, presumably, be the same. The procedures need to be rigorous, whether we are talking about licensing person guards, their supervisors or those engaged in the important business of gathering intelligence.

I hope that the Minister will accept that things are different when it comes to training requirements. In short, the jobs are very different. The nature and, arguably, the level of skills required for the performance of one function relative to those required for the performance of another are substantially different. I do not believe that the training systems can be the same because the training will be different, and of a different duration. It may be provided by people who on the strength of their experience are expert in one aspect of the private security industry, but not in another. However, there is the principle—I may have been overly pedantic, as this is probably what the right hon. Gentleman has in mind—that there should be a system of training requirement, and that it should not be voluntary. It should be obligatory and apply to everyone who wants to enter the sector or to stay in it.

If someone working in the private security industry in its unregulated form is an effective operative but has no formal qualification, that individual might be offended by any suggestion that he or she is not suitable to perform the duties that he or she is performing under contract. Nevertheless, that individual is not performing the job on the strength of any professional or other qualification, for the simple reason that he or she has never been required to obtain such a qualification. Presumably, whether or not the Bill is amended, it will be obligatory for existing operatives to acquire the qualifications that we are about to insist that new entrants should acquire. I would welcome an assurance from the Minister of State on that point.

Such an approach might be burdensome for people who already work in the industry, but it would be consistent with the letter and spirit of the new clause and would at least prevent the existence of two categories of citizen. It would ensure not only what my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) is inclined to call equality of esteem, but equality of treatment. We would be making it clear that everybody who works in the sector must measure up to the standards. It may be an entirely prosaic matter for a very experienced operative briefly to take the relevant course and examinations, to acquire the certificate and to wear the tee-shirt to say that he or she has done so. Nevertheless, the certainty that existing operatives have acquired the qualifications that their new counterparts will be obliged to gain as a precondition of service is likely to be central to the achievement and retention of confidence in the newly regulated industry.

I have not the slightest idea what the Minister will say about the matter. I have expressed my natural apprehension about regulation and regulation harmonisation, and my even greater apprehension about a regulation harmonisation committee. The proposal seems a slightly suspect specimen, although I am ready to admit that it is much less suspect in the tender and competent hands of the right hon. Member for Walsall, South than it would be in the hands of almost any other hon. Member. In fairness to the right hon. Gentleman, it should be said that the purpose that he has in mind is absolutely sound. The issue is this: does the Minister agree with that purpose and, if he does, does he think that the new clause is necessary? If the answer is yes to the first question, but no to the second, perhaps he would care to explain what I think he would describe in his inimitable terms as his preferred third way.

Mr. Charles Clarke: I was glad that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) referred to the definition provided by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) of equality of esteem. I am certain that, after the general election, there will be a debate on that subject in the Conservative party, between the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)—the current Leader of the Opposition—and the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), as they appeal for the ideological support of various bits of their party. I think that the hon. Member for Buckingham is on the fence with regard to those various attractive propositions.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): He will go with the wind.

Mr. Clarke: I doubt it. The hon. Gentleman is a rather oleaginous man, and oleaginous people do not go with the wind.

On the central point of the new clause, I can answer the hon. Member for Buckingham positively. I recognise its aspiration and I welcome it with enthusiasm. I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) is right to raise the matter with which it deals. As a minor aside, he should acknowledge that one of the ambitions of the better regulation taskforce, which has its pluses and minuses in his lexicon, is to achieve a more harmonised regulatory regime, with a view to lifting burdens from small business in particular. That is important where inappropriate regulation as a result of years of legislation introduced by Governments of all parties has imposed burdens that might be inappropriate for particular firms, industries and so on. Harmonisation—perhaps "simplification" is an even better word—is an important and worthy aspiration for the Government and I can enthusiastically endorse that aspect of my right hon. Friend's approach.

However, the new clause falls into the category of the quarter loaf that I described earlier. There is no fundamental difference of approach between my right hon. Friend and me, but we must consider how to deal with the matter in the context of the Bill. The Security Industry Authority is being established as the central and authoritative regulatory body for the industry and will be given a number of specific and important remits to discharge. To respond to the specific point that the hon. Member for Buckingham made, every organisation that the authority regulates will be obliged to adhere to its standards. That is the right way in which to proceed. To carry out its remit effectively, the authority will need fully to consult all interested parties throughout the industry while preserving its authority and independence. That is axiomatic to our thinking.

5 pm

The industry will be one of the prime sources of intelligence for the authority. However, there are also several other stakeholders to whom it will listen. They include the police, local authorities, customers, employees of the industry, and other public bodies and Departments.

Mr. Bercow: The Minister has reassured me that the Bill will require all existing and new operatives to be suitably qualified, and I am grateful for that. Nevertheless, he also said that he wanted to minimise burdens on business when possible. In the spirit of marrying those twin, equally important objectives, perhaps we should provide an opportunity for existing operatives to acquire the relevant qualifications by short-circuited means. It is possible to take a crash course—it is an unfortunate term in relation to driving—of lessons to qualify to drive. Would the Minister therefore admit of the possibility that existing operatives could acquire the standard and gain the qualification through an intensive course over a shorter period, rather than a more leisurely course over a longer period?

Mr. Clarke: I admit of the possibility, but I do not envisage things being as the hon. Gentleman describes them. As everyone involved in change management knows, managing change from the status quo to the required desirable state is one of the most difficult tasks. It is difficult for any organisation, including a regulatory organisation, such as the SIA when it is established, to achieve. I cannot predict specific paths or educational courses for the change from the status quo to the future, regulated state.

However, when the authority determines its regime for facilitating the change, it is right for it to take account of the fact that many people who currently work in the industry have not had the opportunity to gain the qualifications to which the hon. Gentleman refers. An overnight transformation in such circumstances would therefore be ridiculous. Such matters are all part and parcel of the art of making the change, which the new authority must tackle. That is one reason for the importance of conducting wide consultation. The board that we have discussed will comprise a range of interests that will enable the authority to operate sensitively.

Paragraph 8 of schedule 1 allows the authority to establish specialist advisory committees to help it in its work. That is another important means of establishing a regime. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South knows, we have taken the consistent view that we should not specify at this stage that committee X is right and committee Y is wrong, or that it is right to establish committees A, B, C, but wrong to set up committees D, E and F. That must be a matter for the authority. That is the only reason for urging my right hon. Friend to withdraw the motion.

New clause 5 would require the establishment of a specific committee. Clause 1(2)(e) places a general duty on the authority

"to set or approve standards of conduct, training and levels of supervision".

We believe that it is better to focus on outcome rather than to prescribe in detail the precise bureaucratic structure—I do not use "bureaucratic" pejoratively—for achieving those ends.

I am enthusiastic about a properly harmonised regulatory regime. I believe that we should move towards universality in the way my right hon. Friend suggests. However, I do not believe that it is right to prescribe in the Bill the precise regime for achieving that. We should allow the authority to determine that, in consultation with all the relevant parties. On that basis, I ask my right hon. Friend to consider withdrawing the motion.

Mr. Bruce George: I realise that I should have contacted the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) earlier, because his knowledge of the English language is clearly infinitely superior to mine. The words "liaison committee", which I used in an earlier amendment, might have been better for this purpose. Perhaps I should have stuck to that choice, rather than using the word "harmonisation", which has connotations in relation to Europe and the dislike of anything associated with it.

The new clause is not an attempt to create homogeneity inside and outside the areas to be regulated. I merely wished to make it obvious that the world of private security is infinitely more diverse and complicated than the Bill suggests. I wanted to introduce food for thought and raise awareness in the SIA, which I hope will be enlarged, that it does not encompass the totality of the private security industry.

Because we are part of the European Union, and because existing EU directives and other forms of instructions apply to this country as well as to other member states, there will have to be a degree of harmonisation—as there is already—between the standards in our security industry and standards elsewhere, not necessarily in terms of the Bill, but in terms of training standards, for example. I gave a number of examples of that earlier. The security industry that is to be regulated in this country is therefore part of a larger jigsaw.

I have jotted down the areas covered by private security and by security and community safety in local authorities, in relation to the arrangements pertaining before and after the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In Walsall, for example, we have market security for the mediaeval market; an art gallery that might be subject to the legislation; and significant benefit fraud investigations, as does every local authority. Our trading standards department operates according to many of the standards of policing and of private security. It investigates crime and counterfeiting, exactly as the private security industry can do, and its staff has the power to kick down doors, which is more than the police or, certainly, the private security industry have. Because of the way in which that department operates, therefore, it is partly private security and partly police.

Local authorities such as Walsall have education security and housing security. We also have architectural liaison officers, because the Home Office has inculcated a set of attitudes relating to security by design. Most local authorities have community safety departments—Walsall certainly does—and risk assessment units linked to insurance, which advise the local authority on how to minimise risk. That can involve building fences and installing alarms, which, in a way, pertain to some of the responsibilities of the private security industry.

I presume that every local authority has parks—with what used to be called parkies when I was a kid and what might be now called park rangers—and facilities management services. They have a whole list of facilities that might pertain to private security. I had a long list from the Minister of the projects funded by his Department on risk reduction in community protection, of the vast amounts of funds going into drugs awareness and of what is being done to reduce drug dependency. I hope to have a parliamentary answer shortly to my question about the money provided by other Departments for regeneration. That package contains elements relating to security, including private security.

Focusing on one local authority, Walsall borough council—albeit relatively briefly—reveals a bundle of functions within an authority's competence that are somewhere between policing and private security, both before and after the Crime and Disorder Act. I wanted to broaden the horizons of the regulatory authority, and make it realise that there was a world of security outside its scope. I did not wish to lay down communal standards: investigation of art thefts is clearly different from investigation of benefit fraud.

Standards cannot be uniform, but it is to be hoped that if different organisations are aware of the nature of private security—and of Government security that looks like private security—best practice will be disseminated from one sector to the other without the imposition of rigid standards. Perhaps reading the record of our debate will at least encourage the regulatory authority to commission research, and give it some ideas about how to operate. Even if no amendments are accepted, we shall have stimulated discussion. I hope that much of what has been said will percolate into the new authority, whose conduct and operations I shall observe with enormous interest.

Having received some assurances from the Minister, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3

CONDUCT PROHIBITED WITHOUT A LICENCE

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 3, line 51, at end insert—

> '(3A) Before making an order under subsection (3) which designates any of the activities specified in paragraph 5 of Schedule 2, which relate to the security of information which is held in electronic form, the Secretary of State shall lay a certificate before each House of Parliament stating that in his opinion the order complies with the provisions of European Directive 2000/31/EC (on certain legal aspects of information society services, in particular electronic commerce, in the internal market).'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 2, in schedule 2, page 28, line 17, at end insert—

> '(5) This paragraph does not apply to the giving of advice in relation to the security of information which is held in electronic form.'.

Mr. Hawkins: Amendment No. 3 would require the Secretary of State, when introducing regulation of the information technology security sector, to state specifically that doing so does not conflict with the European directive on e-commerce. The issue, which we raised more than once in Committee, relates to many concerns expressed by the Confederation of British Industry and others about whether regulation of the IT security industry would conflict with the directive, which is designed to ensure a level playing field for the IT industry throughout Europe.

On 26 April, in response to the concerns that we had raised, the Minister said in Committee:

> "I was aware of the directive in general, but not in detail, and if I have any further thoughts on its implications I will comment in the debate on schedule 2."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 26 April 2001; c. 146.]

As the Minister will recall, when we came to debate schedule 2, time was extremely short, owing to the operation of the Government's programme. The Minister therefore made no further reference to the directive. We shall press him to do so today, but in the meantime yet further serious concerns have been raised.

As recently as today, I have read the views of the important and influential group that was so involved in drawing attention to the Government's defects in connection with IR35. The Professional Contractors Group—the contractors' industry body, one of whose leading members happens to be a constituent of mine—says:

> "We're very aware of this piece of legislation and understand that it is not intended to target IT contractors . . . We would be very surprised if the government attempted to bring IT contractors within the scope of this legislation. If they did we would object to it."

More significantly still, the Professional Contractors Group goes on to say:

> "Any government that talks about being joined-up but wants to treat a 21st century industry in the same simplistic way as its approach towards wheel-clampers and getting drunks out of bars effectively is not taking the IT industry seriously, and is making a mistake."

Mr. Caspar Bowden, director of the Foundation for Information Policy Research, said:

> "If the Home Office has no intention of wading into this area, why not grant an amendment?"

5.15 pm

The Government are in trouble over this issue. On 26 April, when he was responding to our initial debate in Committee, the Minister mentioned the fact that, while sitting on a train, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry had been badgered about the very obvious conflict between the European directive—to which the Government, in the form of the Department of Trade and Industry, have signed up—and this legislation. However, although the Government have accidentally caught the information technology industry in the Bill, they have thus far been very reluctant to acknowledge their mistake and to do something about it.

Chapter II, article 4 of the directive is very specific. It states:

> "Member States shall ensure that the taking up and pursuit of the activity of an information society service provider may not be made subject to prior authorisation or any other requirement having equivalent effect."

The directive specifically states that the provider "may not" be made subject to those matters, and its provisions are mandatory. Moreover, the directive—to which the Government have signed up the United Kingdom—is due to come into effect in February 2002. However, the CBI has made it clear that the Government's proposals in the Bill to require licensing of the information security industry—which is of course a key information society

[Mr. Hawkins]

service—would be directly contrary to the electronic commerce directive. Very fairly, in responding to our debate on 26 April, the Minister did not for a moment suggest that he could positively state that the provisions and the directive were not in conflict. Indeed, it had all quite clearly taken him by surprise.

A requirement, as proposed in the Bill, for members of the information security industry to obtain licences from a regulatory authority to enable them to operate clearly would constitute requiring "prior authorisation", thereby directly contravening the directive. That article of the directive is intended, among other things, to prevent member states from introducing regulation that would stem the much-needed supply of information technology professionals. The directive is therefore intended to prevent member states from doing precisely what the Government have been seeking to do—albeit perhaps initially by accident—in the Bill. As the provision is still in the Bill, we have tabled and moved our amendment to deal with that concern.

The CBI has also pointed out that, when considering the conflict between the electronic commerce directive and the legislation, consideration should be given also to article 3 of the electronic commerce directive, which aims to free up the internal market for information society services by requiring member states to avoid any measures that might

> "restrict the freedom to provide information society services from another Member State."

As the CBI has pointed out, regulating the information security industry in the United Kingdom would be very difficult to do without putting practitioners outside the United Kingdom at a disadvantage—which would obviously contravene article 3 of the directive.

When we raised the issue on 26 April, there was no doubt that the Home Office had not had an opportunity fully to consider the matter. However, the Minister promised that he and his officials would do so. We shall look with interest to see whether they have done so. Nevertheless, those who are commenting on our debates—particularly, as I said in Committee, the journalists on *Computer Weekly*—are describing the issue, as last Friday's *Computer Weekly* headline did, as the

> "Last chance to prevent licensing threat to IT consultants".

Mr. Miller: Come on.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman may disagree with the learned editors of *Computer Weekly*, but I think that I prefer their expert judgment to his sedentary comment.

Our amendment No. 2 would go further than amendment No. 3 by entirely excluding IT security consultants from the legislation. We say that given the botched nature of the consultation and the hurried way in which the Government have conducted all their dealings in respect of this legislation, the Minister and his officials should ask themselves whether the IT security sector should be included in the Bill at this stage. If the Minister wants to include it after the Bill is enacted, he can always do so by way of amending schedule 2 through a regulation taken under the affirmative resolution procedure, which would ensure that there was proper parliamentary scrutiny. We expect to hear some very firm answers from the Minister today. The IT security consultants will look very carefully at the Government's response.

The sector is one of our success stories. I know that from my experience prior to entering the House in 1992 and from the growth in IT security since then. I used to deal with those involved in IT security in financial services and banking and I know that it has been a UK success story. Our IT security consultants are regarded as among the most skilful and best in the world. We do not want the Government to damage their future opportunities, particularly through carelessness and inadvertence. If the Minister gets this wrong, he will be under huge pressure. The Government have already given themselves one self-inflicted wound over IR35 and destroyed a great deal of their credibility with consultants in the IT field. Labour Members know that perfectly well. The Government have suffered huge embarrassment over IR35 and it is no doubt one reason why they will lose the general election. However, I hope that even at this eleventh hour the Minister will concede that our amendments Nos. 3 or 2 would improve the matter dramatically and we look forward to hearing whether the hon. Gentleman will at long last see sense on this very important matter.

Mr. Miller: I want briefly to respond to a couple of points that were made by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath—via Blackpool—(Mr. Hawkins). This afternoon we have already identified the fact that definitions are rather difficult. Indeed, we have discussed whether or not the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is oleaginous, but I will not get drawn down that route. I tried to make this point right at the end of our proceedings in Committee, at column 229 on 1 May, but unfortunately owing to the timetable of our proceedings I was cut short in my prime. Let me try again for the benefit of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath.

It is not that there is no problem. The hon. Gentleman was absolutely right to identify the problem, but he failed to point out the fact that the Minister has offered a solution. The hon. Gentleman needs to respond to Caspar Bowden, *Computer Weekly*, the Confederation of British Industry and others, as I have responded to people who have contacted me, that the solution lies in secondary legislation.

Let me explain to the hon. Gentleman why his amendment fails badly and would severely damage the Bill. Let me say, in the spirit of the way in which the Committee was conducted, that there is broad cross-party agreement on the principles behind the Bill, but amendment No. 2 includes the phrase "held in electronic form". That must refer both to the intellectual property that is digitalised and held in electronic form and to the physical medium. It is impossible to separate the two. The amendment must therefore refer to both.

If the amendment were accepted, it would be impossible to distinguish between companies that should be regulated and companies that need not fall within the scope of the Bill. Indeed, it could possibly mean that provision of security to a firm with a computer—and that would cover an awful lot of firms—would not require a licence under the Bill. Clearly, that is not the intention and I accept that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath is not trying to wreck the Bill, but the logic of his position is flawed.

It is right to draw attention to the problem, but the solution is obvious and was presented to the Standing Committee. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will restate that solution when he responds to the debate, and thereby put at rest the minds of the many people in the computer industry with whom I have close contact. It is wrong to try to instil fear in an important sector of the industry with a scare story such as this.

I urge the hon. Member for Surrey Heath to withdraw the amendment, which could damage the spirit of the Bill. Debate should turn to the extremely difficult question of defining, in the context of this Bill and of future legislation, the difference between the medium in which data are held and the information itself. That matter will crop up in many debates in the next Parliament. However, I am sure that the Opposition by that time will have a new leader, and that the hon. Members for Surrey Heath and for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will be supporting a new tone of Toryism.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I apologise to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) for not being here for his opening remarks, although I did manage to hear them. The announcement of the dissolution of Parliament meant that I was trying to organise Home Office business with the Government and the two Houses of Parliament.

I shall be brief. I agree that we must uphold and develop Britain's e-commerce industry and information technology sector. We must not frighten people in the sector, or allow unfair regulations and controls to drive the industry out of the country at a time when it is doing well. We must be careful that we do not legislate in part and in haste, and repent much more fully and at leisure.

Liberal Democrat Members share the Government's view that it would be wrong for the Bill to sweep in and regulate the information technology and e-commerce sectors. Some issues cannot easily be accommodated in the context of a regulatory system, even if that is an opt-in system. Those issues arise from the legislation covering data protection and the regulation of investigatory powers, which have been dealt with in other Bills.

We need to understand the Home Office's approach to this matter, and the relevance of the interests that other Departments—such as the Department of Trade and Industry—have in it. The right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) said earlier that we need proper harmonisation and co-ordination to avoid sending the wrong signal by legislating unwisely.

If I thought that there was a clear doubt about the subject—and if I had not been satisfied by the Minister's assurances—I would be sympathetic to the amendment. The Conservative party is perfectly right to raise the issue. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) and I disagree only to this extent; I do not think that the Conservatives are unfairly raising an issue, and they are not frightening people. It is perfectly proper to raise the issue and to get the position on the record. We always need a balance in this place between getting certainty in legislation on the one hand and not making legislation so long that every eventuality is covered on the other.

I understand and sympathise with the genesis of the Conservative proposals, but I am relieved to say that they are not necessary. The Bill adequately deals with the issue. I will be keen to hear the Minister confirm, as he did in Committee, that the Government are not excluding the IT industry from their consideration and that it is on the agenda. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will make sure that there are no adverse consequences of early action?

5.30 pm

Mr. Bercow: That is a veritable masterpiece, even by the high standards that the hon. Gentleman has set over a long period. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State is chuntering from a sedentary position, to no obvious effect. It is welcome to have the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey's reassurance about the good intentions of the Conservative party in this matter, but his speech has highlighted the problem. He says that he agrees with the Government that it is not intended to regulate the IT sector—but that is precisely the point. There is an apparent disparity—in the intention and, so far, in expressed words—between the stance of the Home Office on the one hand and that of the DTI on the other. It is about that that we are arguing.

Mr. Hughes: In amendment No. 2, the Conservatives are seeking to exclude for all time from the Bill advice in relation to security and information that is held in electronic form. The Government have said that the Bill is a rolling programme; this is a framework Bill. It is not compulsory, and people can opt into it. Some of us have argued that the Bill should have been compulsory for some sectors. I also understand that sectors move quickly. The Minister will know that I have concerns about accountancy firms that were not doing security work at all but now are and which have fallen within the remit of the Bill.

The central criticism of the amendment is that it shuts the door for all time on the matter. That is not reasonable. If an appropriate agreement can be made, there is logic in having everybody who does security work included. No matter which party is in power following the 7 June election, nobody will suddenly sweep the IT industry into the regulations. We have had a perfectly proper debate about an important sector. We may not need to include this type of information in legislation. If we do, we ought to try to identify all the relevant sectors. We would then have a great list in the legislation, and that is not necessary.

Mr. Charles Clarke: In broad terms, I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), because their analysis is correct. I am looking forward to fighting the general election campaign if the Leader of the Opposition chooses IR35 as the slogan behind which he hopes to unite Conservative voters throughout the country so as to sweep the Conservatives to power.

As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said, it is reasonable to raise the issue addressed in the amendments. However, the case is not strengthened by arguing that it is on a par with the fixed penalty notice debate that we had on earlier legislation, and that was a trivial point made by the individual who argued the case to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). Nor do I accept the adjectives that the hon. Gentleman used. The Bill is not careless, inadvertent,

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

botched or over-hasty, either in relation to the IT sector or more generally. The process, from consultation to White Paper to legislation, has allowed a wide contribution from wide interests to the crafting of the Bill.

Amendment No. 3 requires any order designating as licensable conduct the activities of IT security consultants to be preceded by a certificate stating that the order complies with the electronic commerce directive 2000/31/EC, which is designed to ensure the free movement of information society services between EU member states. It relates to the provision of remunerated services at a distance by electronic means and at the individual request of a recipient of services. Services provided in the physical presence of the provider and recipient are not covered, even if they involve the use of electronic devices.

Article III of the directive, about which I was questioned, is about the cross-border provision of information society services, and article IV prohibits the taking up and pursuit of the activity of an information society service provider being made subject to prior authorisation or any other requirement having equivalent effect. Article IV does not apply, however, to prior authorisation schemes that are not specifically targeted at information society services, so it would be unlikely to affect the application of this Bill.

Nevertheless, the Home Office would clearly need to consider very carefully the implications of the directive if it intended to introduce regulation of IT security consultants under the provisions of this Bill, but—and here I take the point made by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey—as we do not intend to, we will not have to address the issue in the way suggested by amendment No. 3.

Amendment No. 2 is more substantive. We recognise that part of the information technology sector has been concerned about what application, if any, the Bill will have to it. Specifically, the sector is concerned that the Government want to regulate it under the Bill. We discussed the point in Committee at some length, and we said that the definition of "security consultant" used in schedule 2 is deliberately broad. That is because we want it to remain usable in the face of changing security systems, in particular those making use of technology. It is in that context that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey and my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston are right to say that we must draft the Bill and implement it in a way that is sensitive to how the industry may develop.

The term "security consultant" means someone advising on

> "the taking of security precautions in relation to any risk to property or to the person".

The licensing requirements under that definition will, as with all parts of the Bill, be brought into effect in due course by implementing regulations, and those regulations will need to specify exactly which security consultancy activities are licensable. Activities that are not specified will not be licensable.

It is our fundamental principle to ensure that the Bill is targeted at those specialist providers of security services whom we have indicated we want to regulate, and that the provisions do not inadvertently catch groups that are not relevant to our policy aims. I tried to put the position of IT security consultants in relation to the Bill beyond doubt on Second Reading and in Committee. In the light of the remarks made in *Computer Weekly*, I should like the IT industry to take careful note of what I said in Committee:

> "I should like it to be clear to the industry and the Committee that the information security consultancy industry is not under threat of licensing at a future date under this Bill."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 1 May 2001; c. 230.]

I made it clear that the Department of Trade and Industry will consult the IT industry on the extent and effectiveness of existing precautions and on whether further action is required. I look forward to seeing the results, because the Government believe that there are issues that need to be explored in relation to confidence in the information security consultancy industry. The business has a vital role to play in protecting the new economy from vandalism and other forms of crime.

Consideration of the Bill has started a valuable debate about how information security consultants may match or exceed the levels of confidence that the Bill will create for other security contractors. The Government's position is absolutely clear and the principles that we set out, of legislating with the industry following proper consultation on an evolving basis, are encapsulated in our approach to the IT security industry.

The amendments are helpful in enabling us to elaborate and clarify an important area of concern, but I urge the hon. Member for Surrey Heath to withdraw amendment No. 3, on the basis of the assurances that I have given. I urge hon. Members not to follow those in the IT security industry who have used exaggerated language about the threat that the Bill might present to the e-business world. That world has absolutely nothing to fear from it.

Mr. Hawkins: I am afraid that the Minister has not persuaded me and, far more importantly, has completely failed to persuade the experts at the Confederation of British Industry. He has repeated yet again that what he is offering is simply further consultation by his friends at the Department of Trade and Industry on the secondary legislation, but the CBI said:

> "Consultation on secondary legislation creates more problems, doesn't solve them. The proposal by the Home Office Minister, Charles Clarke MP, to have the DTI consult on licensing the industry does not help matters. It simply obliges the DTI to carry out a consultation in which all affected parties—the industry itself and its users—are likely to say that regulation is unnecessary. Given that there has been no demand for regulation in the first place, is this a worthwhile use of the DTI's and industry's time and resources?"

The Minister said that we should not suggest that the industry got dragged into the Bill by inadvertence, but the CBI said:

> "Legislative accident, so no consultation:—The IT security industry has fallen under this legislation in an unexpected and accidental way, and this only became apparent during the Bill's passage through the House of Lords. Because of this, the IT security industry and its users had no participation in the consultation that led to the White Paper CM 4254 and the draft legislation itself."

The Minister's two arguments have been comprehensively demolished by the leading experts.

Mr. Clarke: I will not pursue all the hon. Gentleman's points. For clarification, in the event that a criminal individual or organisation sought to develop a presence in the IT security industry in order to undermine companies' security, is he suggesting that there should be no process for looking into the people involved and no application of the general principle of the Bill?

Mr. Hawkins: We are saying that there has been no demand for such regulation and that to use a blunt instrument that is intended to deal with the admitted abuses of cowboy wheelclampers and nightclub bouncers to hit a sophisticated e-business is quite wrong.

The Government have recently been criticised for failing to take user interests into account in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

Mr. Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No, I have already given way to the Minister once and I am coming to an end.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), who is chuntering from a sedentary position, accused the Opposition of indulging in scare stories, but I remind him and other hon. Members that the headlines are written not by us but by those experts in the industry who have considered the Committee proceedings and who have found the Minister's attempted reassurances in Committee and on Second Reading completely unconvincing. They do not think that the problem has gone away at all.

5.45 pm

I am grateful to the hon. Members for Ellesmere Port and Neston and for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) for suggesting that they think that we were right to raise this issue, but we go further; we think that we are acting on behalf of one of the United Kingdom's most important industries. The Government have inappropriately used the blunt instrument of the Bill to try to hit a successful industry that was never intended to be caught, so I am determined to press the amendment to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 111, Noes 315.

Division No. 204] **[5.46 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Keith Simpson and
Mr. James Gray.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*

Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 12

REGISTER OF LICENCES

Mr. Hawkins: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 9, line 42, at end insert—

'(3A) (a) The Authority may, at the request of any person who holds a licence, remove the particulars specified in subsection (3)(b) from any copy of the register which is available for inspection by members of the public under subsection (4) if the following condition is satisfied.

(b) The condition is that the Authority is satisfied that the availability for inspection by members of the public of particulars of the person's usual residential address creates, or (if the Authority were not to comply with the request) would be likely to create, a serious risk that he or a person who lives with him will be subjected to violence or intimidation.

(c) Nothing in this subsection shall be interpreted as allowing any person not to provide the Authority with any of the particulars required by subsection (3).'.

The amendment deals with an important concern, which we raised on Second Reading and in Committee, about the security of the details of people who are licensed by the new Security Industry Authority, which will be available for public inspection in the register that it maintains. We have repeatedly stressed the fact that there will be obvious difficulties for people who are engaged in sensitive security work, or who are night club bouncers or wheelclamping operatives, if they are placed at risk of grudge retaliation attacks by having their addresses made publicly available on a register that can be accessed through the internet. We recognise that disgruntled criminal elements could carry out revenge attacks.

In the Committee's final sitting on 1 May, the Minister said that a similarly worded amendment might find favour with the Government. His approach has been constructive. He recognises that, sadly, links have been proven between more disreputable night club bouncers and the trade in illegal drugs. That world is heavily populated by criminal elements. I have raised with him more than once the possibility of attacks on people's homes if they are trading from their home address and it is published on the register. It is not hard to envisage the consequences of such an unpleasant attack, in which petrol is poured through someone's letterbox and set alight. We see that all too frequently in our towns and inner cities. In many of those tragic cases of criminal arson, people in the house have no connection with the subject of the grudge attack, and young children have been burned to death. That has always worried us, and I am glad that the Minister has been sympathetic to the issues that we have raised.

We drafted the amendment along the same lines as the measure that the Government included in the recent Criminal Justice and Police Bill on the security of company directors' addresses. It would set the same test, whereby the authority should be satisfied that there is a serious risk of violence or intimidation before an address is removed from the register. The issue is serious and we make no apology for returning to it. In the light of the Government's response to it in earlier debates, we hope that the Minister will take a positive approach and, perhaps even at this late stage, break the habit of a lifetime and accept an amendment from the official Opposition.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I, too, shall be brief.

The amendment deals with an important issue and, once again, we have to consider the difficulty of balancing interests. The Bill allows people to opt into a registration system for the security industry. When they register, they become part of the database of information that allows the consumer to discover the nature of the industry, who the owner of a company is and the details of prospective licensed security people. That proposal was debated in Committee and on the Floor of the House, and there has been no disagreement that it is a good thing, but we have to consider whether people should then be able to hide themselves once they have opted in. Although we are sympathetic to the idea, I want to flag up the need for consistency in Government policy.

The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) was right to refer to the Criminal Justice and Police Bill, which is before the other place. The ability of animal rights activists to get hold of the addresses of shareholders and company employees with a view to protesting has been debated. A separate debate has taken place on whether Members of Parliament should be able to conceal their residential address, because some have been harassed or intimidated. Those arguments raise proper democratic issues. I do not believe that Members of Parliament should be entitled to conceal their residential address because it is important that the public know where their MPs live.

I am more sympathetic to shareholders and people involved in companies that deal with animal experimentation. They do not stand for elected office and are not, in that sense, seeking to do a public job. The caveat is that we need two assurances before they, or people involved in the security industry, are able to conceal their addresses. First, a proper process must be in place to establish whether it is justified to keep them out of the public domain. Secondly, we need to protect people against the fiction of the corporate state. The reality is that to pursue the details of a registered company, it is necessary to go first to the register at Companies House to get its address. However, that might be only a post office box number, which simply receives post, or the head office of a set of companies, from which the company in question might not operate. Technically, the address is a link, but it might be a distraction because it does not get us any closer to the action.

I shall be interested to discover where the Minister's sympathies lie. First, should the address be concealed only in exceptional circumstances, after proper authority has been applied, and when it can be challenged? Secondly, would there be protection against a fictitious or meaningless address being displayed? We are worried that people who opt into the registration system might try to opt out of giving their personal details so that the consumer, who might have a complaint about or an interest in the registration, is unable to track them down and obtain the necessary information.

As a postscript, I want to refer to something that was raised in Committee. I do not know how many Charles Clarkes there are in England or how many Nick Hawkinses there are in the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]* I think that the Minister might have been to a certain football ground in Norwich recently. I heard him utter an almost descanted, "There's only one Charles Clarke." I hope that I am allowed 10 seconds of self-indulgence to tell the House that I was on Millwall's terraces on Saturday when it won its last home game of the season 5-0 and took the second division championship. We made a similar chant, although in our case it was a collective "There's only one Millwall football club." That is certainly true, which some people have said is a good thing.

My serious point is that there are many people with the same name. For example, a much more famous Simon Hughes is a very good cricketer, and I was honoured to speak at his benefit. If the residential address is removed, it may be difficult to track down the person who is registered as a licensed private security operative. Nothing will identify the one Charles Clarke, Nick Hawkins or John Bercow from the tens or hundreds of people who share the same name. We need a sensitive response, and I am not sure that removing the address from the register will solve all the problems.

Mr. Charles Clarke: First, may I congratulate Millwall on its promotion to the first division? I assure the team of a very warm welcome when they come to Carrow road. Incidentally, there are more Clarkes in this

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

Parliament than any other name. We are divided only by the presence or absence of the letter "e". The superior clan, such as me, have an "e" and the less distinguished members of the family do not. *[Interruption.]* The surname of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) has an "e" and he is a very distinguished Member of the House. We can only commiserate with those who do not have an "e" and regret their carelessness in losing it or their absent-mindedness in not having one in the first place.

It is not entirely fair of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) to chide me for not accepting amendments tabled by the official Opposition. I do not accept every amendment that they table, but I have a reasonable record in accepting their amendments to several Bills that have been considered this Session.

Mr. Bercow: Will the Minister confirm that the factual record will demonstrate—not least in relation to the passage of the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001—that, although he did not accept any amendments from the official Opposition, by way of a face-saving alternative he accepted the gravamen of the amendments and introduced new clauses of his own at a later stage?

Mr. Clarke: When we discussed the issues in Committee, I genuinely tried to do that. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and I shall ask my friend Mr. Mark Seddon—the hon. Gentleman's opponent at the general election—to pay the appropriate tribute to him when the opportunity arises. I have also accepted Opposition amendments straight off with whatever loss of face that may result for me. That is the right way for the House to consider such issues.

The issue is serious and was discussed fully on Second Reading and in Committee. However, the best debate that I have attended on the subject took place in the Committee on the Criminal Justice and Police Bill when we discussed animal rights activists. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath for the way in which he moved the amendment. There is common ground in the House on the need to deal with these issues properly.

As I explained in Committee, the wording of clause 12(3)(b) makes it clear that the address to be published in the register is that

"which satisfies the prescribed requirements".

In prescribing the requirements for addresses that are entered in the register, the Secretary of State can take account of the personal safety concerns that lie behind the amendment.

Our intention is that the regulations will require that, in the vast majority of cases, the address entered in the register should be the business address of the firm employing the security operative, or from which the operative works. Some security operatives work from home, so it may be necessary to require the home address to be included in the register, but—as we have said before—we are open to alternative suggestions. The important thing is for the licence holder to be identifiable and to be traceable by the authority.

6.15 pm

Clause 12(1) requires the authority to establish and maintain a register containing the details laid down in subsection (3). Clearly the authority must itself have full details of those it has approved for licences, but that does not mean that the authority must publish that register in full. Indeed, subsection (4) makes it the duty of the authority to ensure that such arrangements are in force as it considers appropriate for members of the public and others to inspect the contents of the register. It will thus be open to the authority to establish a means for individual licence applicants to make a case for limiting the personal information appearing on the publicly available register, and for a suitable mechanism to be established for that purpose.

The general usefulness of the register to the user of security services will depend on its ease of access and the reliability of its contents. The balance is an issue that the authority will have to consider carefully. The key point that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath must consider is whether it is necessary for the authority to consider the appropriateness of publishing information on individuals or more generally. Although it is important for the Secretary of State to take account of personal safety concerns in prescribing requirements, the evidence factor must be a consideration. In the case of the animal rights issues to which the hon. Gentleman referred, there is clear evidence of such organisations' preparedness to attack people in their homes. Evidence is clearly a factor.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to the Minister for the serious way in which he has considered these matters. As he said, there is some common ground between the parties, but is he prepared to go a little further? In any discussions that he might have with his officials over the next few days, which might lead to the Home Office advising the authority when it is set up, will he specifically draw attention to the fact that he will urge the authority to exercise flexibility when people work from home? It would be very helpful if he could say that.

Mr. Clarke: I am happy to give that important assurance. Two factors are important. First, the Secretary of State can take account of personal safety when he or she specifies the requirements for addresses and, secondly, the authority must decide whether it considers it appropriate to publish the register in full. In both circumstances, evidence—specific or generic—must be taken into account.

I can give the hon. Gentleman the specific assurance that he seeks. I will make sure that the issue is drawn to the attention not only of my officials but of any future Government—whether of his persuasion or mine—after the general election. With that assurance, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be prepared to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Hawkins: As I had hoped, the Minister has been helpful. In the light of what he said about the advice that he is prepared to give and the fact that the authority will examine all our debates on Second Reading, in Committee and tonight, it would not be helpful to press the amendment to a Division. We have ventilated the concerns that are widely shared by all three major parties and this has been a useful debate.

We remain concerned that there will be cases in which the authority feels that it needs to give someone who is in the security sector and who works from home a dispensation so that his home address is not published in a register—either one that is open to physical inspection or one that appears on the internet—so that that person, his family or anyone who stays with him is not in danger from a grudge or revenge attack. The Minister placed much stress on the need for there to be evidence of a threat, but sometimes there is no warning of a revenge or grudge attack, which creates a difficulty.

We recognise that the Minister has been helpful and has said that the authority will consider carefully the use of its powers. In those circumstances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 19

POWERS OF ENTRY AND INSPECTION

Mr. Simon Hughes: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 15, line 18, at end insert—

> '(3A) A person exercising the power conferred by subsection (1) shall do so reasonably only in the course of his duty and only as part of a series of routine checks or as a result of reasonable suspicion of breach of regulations or commission of an offence under any provision of this Act.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 9, in clause 20, page 16, line 23, at end insert—

> '(4) No document shall be published under subsection (1) or (2) unless a draft of the document has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Hughes: The amendments are straightforward. They relate to clauses 19 and 20 which are among the four clauses that deal with entry, inspection and information. For various reasons, these matters were not debated at any length in Committee.

Once a regulatory authority for the security industry has been set up under the Bill and people and concerns are regulated, clauses 19 and 20 give power for the authority to go in, inspect and regulate. One cannot argue with that; a regulatory authority has to go in and see what is going on. The amendments seek to make sure that that is not done with oppression or harassment. To step back for a second, there is a difference between the way we regulate activity subject to a licensed regime and the way we regulate normal daily activity that does not need licensing.

Motoring is an obvious example: if people apply for and obtain a driving licence, they do not have to drive a car—that is optional. However, if they do, by definition they subject themselves to a regime involving both inspection of the vehicle that they drive and related controls. People do not have to run a pub, but if they apply to run one, they know that there are certain rules and conditions when the magistrates grant a licence. That is different from the way in which we should be regulated as we walk down the street or live in our homes. I am against the idea that people should be able to climb up drainpipes, climb through windows and stop someone for no good purpose, claiming that they are just carrying out a spot check to see if he is behaving himself. That applies even to controversial things; without reasonable suspicion, the police and other authorities should not be able to stop people going about their lawful business just because they think that someone might be carrying a stolen item, a little cannabis or whatever. Quite rightly, criminal law states that there must be reasonable suspicion of an offence before an authority can act.

A distinction therefore has to be made when we talk about the licensing regime. People do not have to be bouncers or employ others to run a security business; they do not have to be wheelclampers or work for a wheelclamping firm. The regime is therefore an opt-in regime so, naturally and reasonably, there will be powers of entry and inspection that allow the authority to exercise its proper functions, as agreed in legislation.

Mr. Bercow: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not embarrassed about what he has just said, as he certainly does not need to be. Does he accept that his objection to the idea that police officers and other agents of public authorities should be able to go marauding around private property or commercial premises without authority or good excuse should not divide the parties in any way? The argument is between those who might genuinely be considered libertarians and those who are unthinking and arrogant authoritarians.

Mr. Hughes: I agree. I do not want to be over-distracted, but the tension between the two tendencies is interesting. Sometimes the hon. Gentleman's party expresses excessively authoritarian sentiments which, in all probability, he does not agree with; the Labour party certainly includes libertarians, but it also has people who are clearly authoritarian.

I know that the example I am about to give is not central to the Bill, but it is a parallel. Later this evening, the House of Lords will debate DNA sampling, a matter which hon. Members have already discussed. The lords will consider whether it is appropriate for the police to take samples and keep them if people are innocent of suspected crimes. Those of us with a libertarian perspective believe that it is wrong for the state to keep acquiring possessions if that cannot be justified on the grounds of an offence against the rules of the state. That is the issue.

Amendment No. 8 would impose, at an appropriate stage, a limitation to the power exercised under clause 19. The other place accepted an amendment stating that a person exercising the power of entry and inspection

> "shall do so only at a reasonable hour."

I am conscious of the fact that we are at the end of the parliamentary Session, but we are seeking to persuade the House to add to clause 19 a statement that a person exercising such power

> "shall do so reasonably only in the course of his duty and only as part of a series of routine checks or as a result of reasonable suspicion of breach of regulations or commission of an offence".

We are obviously trying to guard against someone in the regulatory authority calling on a certain person, company or club every Thursday simply because they have decided to do so. It is reasonable to have routine inspections, a bit like those for schools, and the odd spot check, and it is certainly reasonable for the authority to go in if it is tipped off that something funny is going on, but we must have protection against oppression.

When the Minister responds, I should be grateful—if the amendment is not accepted—for an explanation of what protection the legislation provides against the abuse

[Mr. Hughes]

of power. He may deal with the drafting of clause 20, to which we tabled amendment No. 9. Clause 20 recognises that the power of entry is controversial and states that the authority shall have a duty

"to prepare and publish a document containing its guidance"

on how people should go about discharging their right to enter and inspect premises.

In Committee, we had a long debate about the different things that the authority will do. The Bill makes provision for guidance, and the Government may introduce secondary legislation. We are pleased that there will be management of the power of the authority by a guidance document but, because rights of entry and inspection are civil liberty issues, it is important that that document should come before Parliament for approval. Amendment No. 9 requires that the guidance document will not be published unless both Houses of Parliament have seen and approved a draft. Colleagues will know that that is a common procedure when Parliament deals with sensitive matters: we allow someone else to do the work, but want to sign off the document as appropriate, having ensured that we will protect the liberties of our citizens. I hope that the amendments appeal to the House in their detail, but certainly in their spirit; I commend them to the House.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) has tabled a sensible set of amendments; he will be aware of the significance of our exchanges on the subject in Committee.

I am always a generous-spirited fellow, as you will readily testify, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Far be it from me to accuse the hon. Gentleman of plagiarism; he would not be guilty of any such thing because he has an original and penetrating mind. However, he would be prepared to concede that there is a commonality of spirit between his party and ours on the subject. Because of his recollection of our deliberations in Committee, he will know that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) argued that the power of entry and inspection should not be exercised by an officer unless he reasonably suspects a breach of the regulations or the commission of an offence under the Act.

To his credit, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey has followed my hon. Friend's train of thought on that occasion, as well as before and since, in deploying the formulation "reasonable suspicion" in amendment No. 8. He makes an eminently sensible point. Nobody disputes that there should be powers of entry and inspection; the argument is about the means by which they are exercised. The hon. Gentleman chose to focus on an important point about the nature of the exercise of the power. As he put it, his concern is that, unless the power is reasonably circumscribed, not least by the use of the word "reasonable" or by a reference to ordinary hours of the day, an overly zealous officer, probably in the minority but nevertheless burdensome for the person suffering from the exercise of the power, may choose willy-nilly, almost at random and without obvious good cause or excuse, to rampage through—I accept that that is an evaluative and strong-minded term—the property of the person who, however unreasonably and without evidence, he suspects of a breach of the regulations or the commission of an offence.

6.30 pm

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey has a point—there is a danger that inspections will otherwise take place without justification. There is also a possibility, again highlighted by the hon. Gentleman, that an overly zealous officer might choose to make regular inspections at the same time on what might be regarded as such a repetitive basis that it becomes intimidating.

There are other possibilities. Far from choosing to visit at the same time for a series of weeks in succession in such a manner as to appear intimidatory, an officer might choose to visit the same property, premises or sets of premises held by a company on various days and at various times but without obvious authority or good cause. That would be equally intimidatory.

In fairness, the Government have said that there must be an element of unpredictability. If people know in advance that they are to be visited or that they can expect to be visited at exactly the same time, they are likely, particularly if they are in breach of the legislation, adequately to prepare themselves to ensure that they are not caught out. The Minister has said that on a number of occasions, and he has a fair point. However, I understand that there is to be an obligation under clause 19, in its unamended form, for the person who is conducting the inspection to be authorised in writing. If so, I assume, for the purposes of the argument and our assessment of the merits or otherwise of the clause, that that will mean not only authority in writing to make the inspection but notification in writing of the intended date and time. If I have misread the clause on that significant point, I should be happy to be corrected by the Minister and thereby reassured.

The Minister, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey will have noticed, has looked eagerly in the direction of those whom I cannot name or refer to by title, but whose responsibility it is to provide the Minister with advice. They are what might be described as the nameless and faceless ones, but they sit not far from the Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Even obliquely, the hon. Gentleman should not pursue that.

Mr. Bercow: I am very grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not proposing to dilate upon the point; I thought that I might get away with the occasional animadversion to them, but you have told me, with your formidable shake of the head, that I cannot, and therefore I will not try. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to have some guidance on the point I raised. *[Interruption.]* Does the Minister want to intervene? No, he was merely chuntering from a sedentary position—beneficially, I am sure, as far as our exchanges are concerned.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey has highlighted a significant possibility, and there are others. Inspections could take place at awkward times, possibly in an over-zealous way, and in a manner that would be calculated to intimidate or would in practice do so. The hon. Gentleman, my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath and I share a basic unease about the exercise of entry and inspection powers, which leads us not to dispute the need for them but to try and build in the maximum protection for those who are to be subject to them. I make no bones about it—some of my right hon. and hon. Friends may think that I am a wet liberal on these matters—

Jackie Ballard (Taunton): Oh no.

Mr. Bercow: I am greatly reassured by the hon. Lady's remark, made from a sedentary position. However, I am concerned that people should be properly protected. I am always anxious about the overweening power of the state to busybody and interfere, to harass people and subject them to impertinent inquiry without good cause. In short, this is an issue of civil liberties. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey is a champion of civil liberties, but so are my right hon. and hon. Friends and me.

I should like to put a slightly different point on the amendments to the Minister. It is a new point in the consideration of the Bill but it is not new in the exchanges that the Minister and I have had. I have a feeling that, with his remarkable perspicacity, the Minister will have anticipated this point, which is culled from the experience that we shared in the Committee stage of the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman and I simply disagreed about this point, and we may do so again. It is this: it seems to me that under the terms of the unamended clause 19, people who are or who appear to be—I will come back to the point about appearing to be—regulated individuals under the terms of the Bill will be entitled to greater protection under its terms than people who are not registered or who do not appear to be registered.

As not everybody is familiar with this argument and as I do not want an entirely self-contained and, to everyone else, unintelligible argument with the Minister, it is worth explaining what I have in mind. Clause 19(1) provides that someone who is authorised to enter and inspect the premises of any person who appears to be a regulated person can do so if he or she has authorisation in writing. However, it specifically refers to an entitlement to enter and inspect the premises of someone who appears to be a regulated person. What about those who do not appear to be regulated persons or to have a licence to operate but who are suspected of a breach of the regulations under the legislation or the commission of an offence? Those who are not thought to be regulated—and, to put it more accurately are thought not to be regulated under the legislation but who are thought to be practising, illegally or as cowboys, and to be committing offences—should surely be subject to the not insignificant powers of entry and inspection that clause 19 is intended to confer upon officers. I am not sure what the answer is.

The Minister is a sometimes sagacious fellow but almost invariably a resourceful one. I feel sure that he will have some sort of answer and that it probably will have been provided for him in advance of our debate. I will be fascinated to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say about those who do not appear to be regulated—indeed, who appear not to be regulated—but who do not seem to be subject to the substantial power of clause 19(1).

Mr. Simon Hughes: I follow that point but I am not certain that everyone listening will follow the regulated and non-regulated alternatives proposed by the hon. Gentleman. Is not the logic of the conundrum or dilemma to which the hon. Gentleman refers that it is far better that there is one regime and that everybody should be regulated? Otherwise, there is a two-tier system. Policing those who have opted for regulation means that when someone knocks at a door and the defence is, "Sorry, mate, I am not regulated", nothing can be done about it. That cannot be in the consumers' interest.

Mr. Bercow: The answer to the hon. Gentleman is that everybody who has characteristics in common in terms of job description and the functions they fulfil should be subject to equal treatment. That is a longer but, I hope, accurate way of saying that we should treat like with like. Obviously, we should not treat in exactly the same way people who are in very different categories and who are not performing similar functions, but the hon. Gentleman is otherwise right to say that people who are performing similar work should all be subject to the same regime, so that there is no scope for the inequality of treatment that would otherwise almost inevitably result.

Mr. Charles Clarke: Before the hon. Gentleman develops his argument, will he pause and give his attention to clause 19(8)? Will he consider paragraph (b) in particular?

Mr. Bercow: I am always happy to be referred to a subsection of any clause of which the Minister is the parent. I have focused my beady eye on clause 19(8), which features on page 16 of the Bill, with which I am sure all hon. Members who are present will be intimately familiar. For the avoidance of doubt, I point out that subsection (8) deals with the meaning of the term "regulated person". That seems clear, but I think that the only provision of even modest significance in the subsection—this point is important if the hon. Gentleman is trying to develop an argument—is paragraph (d), which refers to

> "any person who is not so approved but provides security industry services which he is prohibited by any such regulations from providing."

I assume that the Minister is suggesting that an individual who is not fully approved, but who is nevertheless providing services, will be subject to the entry and inspection powers contained in clause 19(1). That is not entirely clear, but if that is what the hon. Gentleman says, I shall not object. Indeed, I shall be tempted to dance around the mulberry bush in appreciation of the fact that the Government have seen the point and have incorporated it in the clause. However, although I am grateful to the Minister for moving me on from page 15 to page 16, I see no good reason why such provision should not be included in subsection (1) to ensure that the matter is clear beyond peradventure. That is my answer to him, but if he tells me that the matter is dealt with and that there is no need for any further i-dotting and t-crossing, I shall be happy to accept his assurance. I would be grateful if he made the matter clear, as it is not trivial. I hope that he will accept that civil liberties and the important issue of equality of treatment, to which the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey and I keep returning, are of the first importance.

I should like briefly to comment on clause 20 and on the attempt of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey to amend it. As I understand it, amendment

[Mr. Bercow]

No. 9 would ensure that no document on the guidance about the way the powers are to be exercised should take effect before

> "a draft of the document has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament."

In short, that is an argument for the affirmative method—I use that term for want of a better one, as we usually use it in relation to the statutory instrument procedure—rather than the negative one. The hon. Gentleman was slightly doubtful about whether everybody would understand the distinctions between regulated and unregulated matters. I argued only that people who are not regulated should not be treated preferentially in comparison with those who are regulated. The point is simply stated: the question of affirmative and negative procedure should be clear beyond doubt to those outside the House who take an interest in these matters. As the Minister, but not everybody, knows, the negative procedure does not allow debate. It means that measures are rammed through the House on the nod, without the opportunity for speeches or voting. However, the affirmative procedure gives hon. Members the chance to express an opinion.

My view is consistent with that of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. I believe that the guidance on the exercise of entry and inspection powers is critical. Great issues are at stake. The powers of the officers must be adequate, or there will be no point in providing for them. Equally, there must also be adequate protection for those who will be subject to the exercise of those powers. It is not entirely a matter of those words that Ministers tend to use in the context of amendments to proposed legislation—our old friends "minor" and "drafting". Issues of judgment, evaluation, degree and what I might best describe as proportionality are involved. In that context, I think that the hon. Gentleman has a good point. Let us see the draft, which can be placed before this House and the other place, and let there be a debate on it in which we can offer our opinions about whether the Government have got the balance broadly correct.

6.45 pm

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath expressed with a world-weary cynicism born of his nine years in the House his hope that the Minister would change the habits of a lifetime and accept an Opposition amendment. I want to renew that plea in an unselfish fashion, on behalf of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. The request in amendment No. 9 for an opportunity to see a draft document and to scrutinise it, as well as for an acknowledgement of hon. Members' right to speak and the possibility of a vote, is of the essence. That request is so transparently reasonable that only an extraordinarily unreasonable Minister could resist it.

The Minister is an assiduous, eager and very ambitious man, as I continually remind him. He is a man who was described by Mr. John Kampfner, the distinguished political commentator of *The Guardian*, as a future leader of the Labour party, and he is now under inspection.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Bercow: I shall perorate in a moment, but how can I refuse to give way to a man who is not only older than me, but substantially bigger?

Mr. Soames: What my hon. Friend says about the Minister is true. Does he agree that it would be a terrible shame if blind, untrammelled ambition were to stand in the way of such a reasonable request from the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), and such profound and splendid oratory from my hon. Friend?

Mr. Bercow: I say to my hon. Friend frankly that I am in danger of becoming emotional. We had a rocky start when this Parliament began. I think he doubted whether I had any right to sit in this place at all, as I went to a state school, paid a mortgage and bought my own furniture. Since then, he has been reconciled to me, and we have what might almost be described as a symbiotic relationship, so often do we see eye to eye on matters of state, both great and small. His interventions are invariably sensible and eloquent. With his unfailing skill in hitting the proverbial nail on the head—a skill that only somebody who has spent as much time on the Clapham omnibus as he has could demonstrate—he has got it absolutely right. We are considering a question of ambition versus reasonableness. I say to the Minister, who is always anxious to throw red meat in the direction of his under-utilised and ordinarily militant Back Benchers—

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Ah!

Mr. Bercow: I say to the Minister that he should prove reason, independence of mind and generosity of spirit. I say to him that now is the opportunity to show oneself to be a man of independent mind and generous nature. Will he pass or fail the examination? I await his response and the answer as to success or failure with bated breath, eager anticipation and beads of sweat upon my brow.

Mr. Charles Clarke: Before I begin, let me say how glad I am to see my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in her place. I would not say that I have a symbiotic relationship with her, as I have been advised by my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) that the only known example of a symbiotic relationship in the natural world is that between a plover and the crocodile from whose tongue it plucks leeches. When the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) described his symbiotic relationship with the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), I was trying to work out which of them was the soft little bird and which was the crocodile. I think that most people would acknowledge that, at a time such as this, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex has the more meat-eating characteristics.

I was amused that the hon. Member for Buckingham began his speech by referring to the alleged plagiarism of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). I do not think that he was correct. Plagiarism is often a two-way relationship. When we discuss the relationship between libertarianism and authoritarianism in the Conservative party, we get into deep waters. At the end of the Conservative party conference last year, everyone lined up behind their libertarian or authoritarian leadership challengers.

Some people listen to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. Some libertarians in Conservative party ranks—perhaps including the hon. Member for Buckingham—may support him, but others would not.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) would not agree with him. In all friendship, I therefore advise the hon. Member for Buckingham not to go far down the road on which he embarked. However, it is an interesting debate. I know that the hon. Gentleman will not make the same mistake as some do of confusing civil rights and libertarianism with the rights and interests of the legal profession.

Let me consider more serious matters. I asked the hon. Gentleman to examine clause 19(8), which defines a regulated person as either

"the holder of any licence granted under this Act"

or

"any person who engages in licensable conduct without being a holder of a licence under this Act".

Licensable conduct is defined in clause 3(2). Clause 19(8) defines the powers that we are discussing as applying to licence holders and people who are engaged, without holding a licence, in the sort of activity that the Bill tries to regulate. I do not, therefore, believe that the hon. Gentleman's anxiety has substance.

Clause 19 provides the authority with an important power that will help it to enforce its licensing regime effectively. It gives it the power to enter premises and require the production of documents or other relevant information.

A person who is properly authorised by the authority will be able to enter premises owned or occupied by a regulated person. Proper authorisation is defined in clause 19(1) and in clause 20, which states:

"It shall be the duty of the Authority to prepare and publish a document containing . . . guidance"

about the way in which authorised people will act. There is no precondition in the Bill for an authorised person to provide prior notice. In general, one would expect prior notice to be given of a visit for routine purposes. However, there is no requirement to do that. Clause 20 provides for the production of guidance, which will set out the terms for giving prior notice. That is also the burden of amendment No. 8.

The Bill provides for guidance, and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey argues that Parliament should consider that guidance. The answer to his question about whether prior notice will always be given under authorisation is no. He also asked whether the notice and the operation of the authorisation would be set out in clear guidelines, which were publicly available and hopefully agreed. The answer is yes.

A regulated person is defined in clause 19(8) as anyone who has or who ought normally to have a licence. Such a person may be required to produce documents or information about licensable conduct, the provision of security services or conditions attaching to approved contractor status under any compulsory scheme, should the voluntary scheme ever be converted into a compulsory one.

Amendment No. 8 would require a person who was authorised to enter premises to do that in a reasonable manner and only as part of a routine check, or as a result of reasonable suspicion of a breach of regulations or commission of an offence. The main effect of the amendment would be to limit the authority's ability to conduct random checks of regulated persons.

The provisions already place several requirements on any person authorised by the authority when exercising the powers. They include: exercising the power only at reasonable times; operating only in relation to persons "appearing" to be regulated—mere suspicion is not enough; and stating the purpose of the inspection. The inspector must produce evidence of identity and authorisation; a record must be made of what happens during the inspection; and a copy of that record must be given to those on the inspected premises if requested. That would form the basis of any subsequent challenge.

Those measures place several requirements on persons entering premises. They take appropriate account of civil liberties while providing a powerful and focused tool to enable the authority to enforce the licensing regime.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister deal with the specific question that the hon. Member for Buckingham and I asked? What provision protects against misuse, harassment and obsessive interest by the regulatory authority? Such behaviour could be covered by the random check, the routine check and the reasonable check but be oppressive none the less.

Mr. Clarke: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the guidance will include dealing with such an effect. However, I do not believe that the state of affairs that he described is likely to arise. The need to state the purpose of the inspection, for which the Bill provides, makes it difficult to make the repeated inspections that he fears.

Amendment No. 9 would require laying before Parliament the guidance, which the SIA will draw up under clause 20, on the exercise of its power of entry. The Bill already requires a significant amount of further parliamentary input to get the authority and its regimes up and running. Several clauses allow the Secretary of State to introduce statutory instruments that activate or specify in greater detail the operations of the SIA.

The content of the statutory instruments will be central in establishing the authority's detailed operating framework, and it is right that they should be brought before Parliament. I am therefore not persuaded that we need to ask Parliament to approve the detail that the amendment would require.

The Bill's main purpose is to establish the SIA and vest in it appropriate discretion to regulate the industry, backed up by specific parliamentary sanctions for its most important aspects. I believe that the authority's approach will be sound and that to require the laying of draft guidance and, perhaps more important, revised guidance—we shall conduct regular revision—before Parliament would detract from the ability to be flexible in evolving circumstances.

I therefore hope that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey will consider withdrawing the amendment.

Mr. Hughes: The debate has been important, and the Minister has given welcome assurances on the first issue that we mentioned. However, the Bill could be described as an outline measure, and we do not know the details. We cannot judge whether the guidance will be adequate until we see it later.

I was amused when the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) had the exchange with the hon. Member for Buckingham. It was suggested that serried ranks of

[Mr. Hughes]

militant Labour Back Benchers sat behind the Minister. There was a gasp of astonishment from the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) because she shares the view that although the Government may want to claim much credit, claiming that their Back Benchers are militant, nearly militant or even active—let alone interested and critical—is an exaggeration well beyond the understanding of anyone who has watched our proceedings in the past four years. The Government may not have had an easy ride from the Opposition, but they have had a mighty easy ride from their Back Benchers. Whatever the result of the election, I hope that that does not continue in the next Parliament.

I sense that interest in the debate has risen to an unexpected height. The Bill has taken on a new and greater importance. For once, I shall give the Minister the benefit of the doubt. On one occasion only, and with no promise of a repeat, I beg to ask leave to withdraw an extremely good amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Business of the House

7 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): Following the Prime Minister's announcement earlier today, and following discussions through the usual channels, the business for tomorrow will now be as follows: a procedural motion relating to the business of the House, followed by the remaining stages of the Finance Bill and the remaining stages of the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill. At 10 o'clock, the House will be asked to approve all outstanding estimates, and we will take proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill. The House may also be asked to consider any Lords Messages that may be received. I hope that the business for later in the week will be announced tomorrow, following further discussions.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I thank the Leader of the House for making her business statement available to me earlier. Following the Prime Minister's valedictory address earlier today, will the right hon. Lady confirm that what is in the second statement tomorrow will be the subject of tomorrow's procedural motion, because it is not clear at the moment whether the procedural motion tomorrow will deal only with tomorrow's business or with the business for the remainder of the week? If that motion will deal with business for the remainder of the week, it is important that the Government should allow sufficient time for it to be debated by the House. Will the right hon. Lady confirm that that will be the case?

Will the Leader of the House also confirm that all the scheduled oral questions for the remainder of the week will take place, including those tabled for Thursday, and will she also tell the House whether the business in Westminster Hall will continue as announced for the rest of the week? Is she able to make a statement tonight about a possible date for Prorogation, as that is obviously a matter of interest on both sides of the House? Also, does she anticipate there being a gap between Prorogation and the Dissolution of Parliament?

Mrs. Beckett: First, on the assumption that the hon. Lady was asking me about a further business statement tomorrow, and about a time for the motion to be debated, was she referring to the business motion?

Mrs. Browning: I am sorry that I did not make that clear. I asked whether the motion that the right hon. Lady has announced today—the procedural motion relating to the business of the House—would include tomorrow's business and any subsequent business.

Mrs. Beckett: My anticipation is that it will certainly include tomorrow's business. It is not yet certain whether it will include business for later in the week, because there will—as I have said—be a further business statement. *[Interruption.]* I suggest that Conservative Members bear in mind the fact that these are matters for negotiation. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, they are.

Secondly, the hon. Lady asked me whether oral questions would take place as scheduled. I anticipate that they will. I also anticipate that the business in

Westminster Hall that has been scheduled will take place. I fear that I cannot give the hon. Lady any of the other information that she seeks.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Given that my right hon. Friend has said that she will make a further statement tomorrow about business for the remainder of the week, which includes Thursday, and given that Thursday is at present scheduled to be an Opposition day, will she do her best to persuade the Opposition to maintain it as an Opposition day so that the House can have the opportunity to hear from the Conservative party how it intends to keep many thousands of people segregated on aeroplanes until the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) has inspected their credentials?

Mrs. Beckett: My right hon. Friend makes an enticing case, but that it is not the business that I have announced—nor do I anticipate doing so.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I encourage the Leader of the House to make tomorrow's statement and the procedural motion as comprehensive as possible and to cover the whole period up to the Dissolution if possible? Otherwise it will be extremely difficult for the House to deal with unfinished business in an orderly manner. There is some very important unfinished legislative business, on accountability in the health service, for example, which I hope will be given proper accountability in the last few days of this Parliament. Some Executive business also remains, and it is extremely difficult for us to maintain our scrutiny of such Government action when the House is not sitting.

I draw the right hon. Lady's attention to the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis, which is still with us, and to the effect of the crisis on the tourist industry, which is causing huge problems at the moment. I note that the Select Committee report on the funds available to the regional development agencies and the tourist boards is totally critical of the amount of funding available. Indeed, the report states, "We find this astonishing." We still require important statements from the Government before the Dissolution of Parliament, and I hope that we shall get a comprehensive programme tomorrow, rather than having to wait until the end of the week.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Lady's statement covered the business for tomorrow. Another statement will follow. Questions now should only be about the statement that the right hon. Lady has made tonight.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. Of course I understand the House's anxiety to be fully informed. Certainly, it would be the Government's wish to put as much information before the House as we can, and we will do so.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): May I have my right hon. Friend's assurance that she will make a statement tomorrow on what is to happen on Friday to my excellent private Member's Bill, which will protect the interests of low-paid shop workers throughout the United Kingdom and which I am quite sure Her Majesty's Government strongly support?

Mrs. Beckett: I listen with sympathy to what I am sure is the first of many fervent pleas. I fear that it is not at present clear to me whether we shall be taking private Members' business on Friday, but I shall bear my hon. Friend's remarks in mind.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): To clarify that point, and in relation to the statement tomorrow, does the Leader of the House envisage that the House will sit from 11.30am to 7 pm on Thursday—or will it sit later? Will the right hon. Lady clarify whether she envisages any time for private Members' Bills on Friday, and does she envisage announcing the Dissolution on Friday or on Monday?

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that all those questions take me into the territory of what would be the business beyond tomorrow. I am not, therefore, in a position to assist the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Leader of the House confirm that there is nothing in the business that she has announced for tomorrow—or, indeed, in the parliamentary business that she will announce tomorrow—that would keep the Deputy Prime Minister out of Scotland over the next wee while, or will he just be kept out because he would blow the gaff on the Government's plans to cut public spending in Scotland after the election?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman has been listening to misinformation. I fear that I am not familiar with the Deputy Prime Minister's present schedule.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): Will the Leader of the House arrange tomorrow to make a statement to the effect that the Government—or perhaps the House of Commons Commission—will refer to Sir Nigel Wicks and the Committee on Standards in Public Life the issue of the resourcing of the Commissioner's Office in the House and the procedure for the re-appointment of the Commissioner for Standards?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I am not aware that that is a prime matter in the business to be brought before the House.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Does the Leader of the House not think that she owes a public apology to Southend-on-Sea? Given that today is the first day in the history of Parliament that we have had an exhibition promoting the glories of Southend in the Upper Waiting Hall, will she urge all her colleagues to visit the exhibition before they go off to fight the election?

Mrs. Beckett: I sincerely apologise to Southend-on-Sea. I shall urge my colleagues to visit not only the exhibition but the town.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I raise a matter that is of concern to all Members of the House, whichever their party? The Prime Minister has announced an election. Although I accept that it might be necessary to wait until tomorrow for details of how the House will conduct its affairs for the rest of the Parliament, is it not possible for the Leader of the House to tell us when the Dissolution of Parliament will take place, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack)

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

asked? It is necessary for Members of Parliament—although not for the Government—to make arrangements as to where their secretaries and equipment are going to be by the end of this week or the beginning of next week.

Mrs. Beckett: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that I understand his point. However, he will be aware, as there has long been an excellent analysis in the Library on this point, that if the general election is to be held on 7 June, the House will have to be dissolved on or before 14 May.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Why is this such a shambles? Is the Leader of the House the only person in the country who did not know that an election was planned? Is she the only person who was not let in on the secret? Have not the Government been planning for this election for more than four years, and should they not be able to tell us when this miserable Parliament is finally going to be dissolved?

Mrs. Beckett: I can only suggest that, not for the first time, the right hon. Gentleman is suffering from an extraordinarily selective memory. If he looks at *Hansards* relating to this stage of past Parliaments, he will find that nothing I have said is in any way unusual.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will there be time for proceedings on the Children's Commissioner for Wales Bill to be completed tomorrow? If not, when will there be time for them to be completed? The Bill is widely supported by Members in all parts of the House, and the Welsh Assembly has worked closely with the Government in trying to secure its passage. If it is not possible to pass the Bill before dissolution, will that not constitute copper-bottomed evidence that the Assembly needs powers to make primary legislation?

Mrs. Beckett: I am afraid I can only tell the hon. Gentleman that it will not be possible to deal with the Bill tomorrow—but, like other business that is before either House, it is very much in the Government's mind.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Can the Leader of the House guarantee that the rights of the House to scrutinise the Government and hold them to account will in no way be compromised by this unseemly last-minute dash into an unnecessary election?

Mrs. Beckett: Certainly the House will continue to enjoy the rights that it has always enjoyed. I simply say to the right hon. Gentleman that he, like his right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), has clearly forgotten this stage of every Parliament in which he has served.

Private Security Industry Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, again considered.

Schedule 1

THE SECURITY INDUSTRY AUTHORITY

7.12 pm

Jackie Ballard: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 24, line 6, at end insert—

> '(1A) Any such report shall include details on the progress of implementing this Act and all new secondary legislation and guidance passed under this Act.'.

Schedule 1 deals with the setting up of the authority—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members leave the Chamber quietly?

Jackie Ballard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Schedule 1 deals with the setting up of the authority. On Second Reading I expressed disappointment at the fact that all its members would be appointed by the Secretary of State; nevertheless one of its duties will be to present him with an annual report which will then be placed in the House of Commons Library. We fear that the Bill, being a framework Bill, will leave a lot of detail to be dealt with later, and that there will not be as much parliamentary scrutiny of that detail as there could be.

This is a small amendment, and I shall not take up much of the House's time. I merely say that, in our view, it is unlikely that an authority set up by the Secretary of State will produce a report on its work over the year that will be in any way critical of what it has done during that period, or will draw attention to its shortcomings. The purpose of the amendment is merely to ensure that the report gives real information, and provides details of further legislation and the progress of this legislation during the year, rather than being a glossy annual document that is of no interest or use to anyone.

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government do not disagree with the substance of the amendment, but in the spirit of the argument frequently advanced by the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) and her hon. Friends that there is no need to include in legislation requirement for action that would routinely be taken, I urge her to withdraw it.

I would expect the SIA's annual report to contain the information that the hon. Lady requests. Clause 1 obliges the authority to report on all the functions specified in that clause, which include the elements identified in the amendment. In the extraordinary event that the annual report did not contain such information, it would be open to the Secretary of State to direct the authority to provide it. I can certainly make a commitment on behalf of the present Government that a future Secretary of State would give such directions if they were necessary.

The precise content of the report will be a matter for the authority, but as I have said, the authority is required to report properly on the operation of its functions as set out in clause 1, and I cannot imagine how it would be possible to do that without including the information specified in the amendment. I therefore hope that the hon. Lady will withdraw the amendment, given my assurance that all the aspects mentioned in schedule 1—including those that she has identified—will be covered.

7.15 pm

Jackie Ballard: I expected the Minister to be courteous and helpful, as he usually is, and I shall be equally courteous and helpful: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 2

ACTIVITIES LIABLE TO CONTROL UNDER THE ACT

Jackie Ballard: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 27, line 8, leave out—

'purposes of any accountancy practice'

and insert—

'sole purposes of accountancy activities'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 12, in page 28, line 9, leave out—

'purposes of any accountancy practice'

and insert—

'sole purposes of accountancy activities.'.

Jackie Ballard: I suspect that we may not get through these amendments as speedily as we got through amendment No. 10. They raise genuine concerns, and have been the subject of debate in Committee and subsequently. The issue was originally raised in the other place.

The Minister and others will be well acquainted with the arguments that have already been rehearsed. They arise because many accountancy firms have branched out into security consultancy work. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) drew attention to a *Financial Times* article that described five big accountancy firms as the top players in the intelligence industry. It seems sensible, if such firms engage in the same activities as others in the security industry, to make them subject to the same licensing regimes. The accountancy firms argue that that is not necessary because they are licensed by the Institute of Chartered Accountants and other bodies, but those bodies were not established to regulate security consulting investigations, or the security activities of accountancy firms.

I accept that employees of accountancy firms who are not members of such bodies, but who engage in licensable conduct, will require licences. Our amendment seeks to limit the exemption to what is purely accountancy work, and tries to ensure that accountants who branch out into the security industry fall within the licensing regime if they deliberately engage in activities that are otherwise covered by the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey withdrew his amendment in Committee, because the Minister said that he recognised the seriousness of the issue and would examine it again. My hon. Friend asked me to pass on his gratitude to the Minister for arranging the meeting that they had this morning.

I stress that the issue for professional security firms is not one of cost compliance; they are happy to be regulated, but they want a level playing field. I look forward to hearing the Minister's further thoughts.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) rightly said that we had discussed these issues in some details in Committee. Moreover, they were raised in amendments proposed by my noble Friend Lord Cope in another place, accepted by the Minister's noble Friends, and introducing some protection for leading accountancy firms.

In Committee, we sought to introduce amendments giving similar protection to those working for law firms. Even at the end of the Committee stage, there was continuing concern among accountants. I have had a submission from the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales suggesting that even the amendments that were tabled by my noble Friend Lord Cope—which now form part of the Bill and which the hon. Lady is seeking to water down—do not go far enough. Therefore, as the Institute of Chartered Accountants is saying that it requires more protection for those who are not chartered members of the institute—they may be students or part-time employees—and that the Bill should go further, and as the hon. Member for Taunton is saying that the Bill goes too far, perhaps we have reached a happy medium, thanks to my noble Friend Lord Cope.

Nevertheless, the hon. Member for Taunton has raised an important issue which will no doubt continue to be considered carefully by the members of the new authority. I look forward to hearing the Minister's confirmation that he will again be prepared to instruct his officials to send the members of the authority information about this debate and our debates in Committee, so that these important matters can be kept under review. I see the Minister helpfully nodding.

As with any new authority, we shall not know for certain how the provisions operate until the authority is up and running. Further revision of secondary legislation or the introduction of fresh primary legislation may be necessary to adapt the regime in the light of experience. The way in which law firms or chartered accountants are covered in future clearly will be a matter of continuing scrutiny by the authority and by the new, incoming Conservative Government who will replace the current Labour Government.

As I said, these are important issues. It is important that the hon. Member for Taunton has raised them again, enabling us to debate them briefly on Report. I shall listen with interest to the Minister's reply.

Mr. Charles Clarke: This is an important issue, and it is difficult to find the right way of addressing it. As the hon. Members for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) and for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) both said, the position of accountants and their employees has been discussed at length in our earlier debates and in the other place. The Bill is targeted on selected providers of private security services; the intention has not been to target it on accountants in general. We also recognise that big accountancy firms have diversified into spheres in which they undertake designated services as defined in the Bill, particularly private investigations and security consultancy.

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

We did respond to strong lobbying in the other place to the effect that members of recognised accountancy bodies should not be caught by the definitions on account of their professional qualifications. It was not only a matter of the self-interest of private firms, as the Serious Fraud Office and the Financial Services Authority also had concerns which were reflected in the debate in the other place.

Amendments were duly tabled and approved in the other place, but they were focused on exempting only members of defined accountancy bodies. We recognised that diversified accountancy firms have many employees who are not members of the relevant accountancy bodies but are undertaking designated activities as defined in the Bill. We fully accepted that to exempt them too would create a seriously uneven playing field. We have also accepted that doing so would mean that private investigators and security consultants describing themselves as such would be licensable, whereas employees of accountancy firms who undertake precisely the same type of consultancy would not be licensable. We have therefore resisted calls, particularly in the other place, to extend exemptions to those employees also.

Jackie Ballard: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall in a moment.

Notwithstanding the arguments made in Committee by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), the complexities of diversified accountancy businesses—although the issues are not dissimilar in relation to IT services—would result in major definitional difficulties in attempting to describe, within the framework of definitions used in the Bill, a clear distinction between accountants acting solely for the purposes of accountancy activities and those undertaking designated activities as defined.

I have some comments to make on my discussion this morning with the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, but shall first give way to the hon. Lady.

Jackie Ballard: The Minister's argument seems to hinge on the fact that accountants will gain an exemption because of their professional qualifications and membership of professional bodies. However, can he give any other example in which someone's membership of a body exempts him or her from regulation when performing a task that is not covered by his or her specific qualification?

Mr. Clarke: As I said, we made concessions on accountancy after hearing representations in the other place. However, as I said in relation to our earlier debate, I think that there are similarities in IT services, in relation to which not dissimilar issues arise.

This morning, following the representations of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, I met him and some of the industry bodies concerned to discuss some of the concerns that have been expressed. I was glad to have the opportunity to meet—and my officials had already met—some of the individuals concerned.

I understand the concern of some in the private investigation sector that even the narrow exemption for members of recognised accountancy bodies could have the effect of creating, as the hon. Member for Taunton said, an uneven playing field. An important point to emphasise—it was not clear to me until this morning—is that it did not seem that the cost burden of licensing within the private investigation sector was the prime cause of an uneven playing field. As that point came across strongly this morning, I think that I should place on record my understanding of what was being said.

The concerns as expressed to me were that potential customers for investigation services might be tempted to regard accountants exempted from regulation in the Bill more favourably than regulated private investigators. It was essentially a branding-image competition point rather than a cost competition point. Although I could see that the argument had some weight, I was not wholly convinced by it. It seemed to me that potential customers for investigation services are more likely to look in the round at the depth, breadth, quality and cost of potential contractors than at the position under the Bill of senior members of the accountancy and investigations professions.

I have, however, listened to the concerns that were expressed at this morning's meeting and by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. Although I cannot undertake to accept amendment No. 11, or to promise change in the Bill at this late stage, I can give an absolute undertaking to the hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for Taunton that the new authority will keep a very close eye on use of the various exemptions granted in the Bill.

We would positively expect the authority to make recommendations for changes if it became clear that the exemptions are operating in a manner that either distorts the level playing field in the provision of services which we are committed to establishing or allows individuals to practise in the sphere who might otherwise be reprehensible in the way in which they were operating a private security business.

I do not put my hand on my heart and say that the compromise that is before us today is defensible against criticism from any of the parties from whom criticism might come. However, in the spirit of trying to legislate in an evolving manner in this area, as we are attempting to do in the Bill, I believe that the Bill provides a perfectly acceptable way of addressing the issue. With the assurance that I have sought to give the hon. Lady—that the authority will watch the issue extremely carefully in relation to accountants and the other professions involved—I hope that she will be prepared to accept that the amendment was intended to make an advance in the sphere, and to consider withdrawing it.

Jackie Ballard: Before responding directly to the Minister's request at the end of his speech, I should like to deal with the comment made by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) to the effect that a proposal that is being attacked from both sides, as going too far or not far enough, must be just about right. I assume that he will not be invoking that maxim in the forthcoming debates in the general election campaign.

Mr. Hawkins: I was restricting my comments to this particular provision and the hon. Lady should not draw any parallels from them.

Jackie Ballard: I am relieved to hear that.

Mr. Bercow: One is not supporting fence sitting, is one?

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Jackie Ballard: I would never expect the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) to support fence sitting. He is probably the least fence-sitting Member of this place.

The Minister said that, earlier today, he met members of the private investigation sector who still have concerns. He was right to say that the key issue is concern not about cost compliance, but about the promotional aspects of the different applicable regimes. He has clearly heard the arguments. He also accepts that a finely balanced decision was required to get it right and that compromise is sometimes, but not always, the right way forward.

The Minister has given the House an assurance about the scrutiny of the operation of exemptions, and on the basis of that assurance I am sure that the private investigation sector will feel happier about that. I therefore beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

7.30 pm

Mr. Charles Clarke: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It gives me a good deal of pride to move the Third Reading of this important Bill, which has been awaited for 25 years. It establishes a new authoritative and independent body, the Security Industry Authority, and it gives the SIA the tools to do an important job: to drive out criminals and cowboys through a system of personal licensing; to recognise good companies by encouraging them to become approved contractors; and to improve standards throughout the industry. The Bill has been subject to comprehensive and constructive debate throughout its parliamentary passage, and, indeed, beforehand.

I acknowledge that the Bill is not perfect. Like any Bill, it is based on judgments that not everyone shares. I acknowledge that some would argue that the Bill is, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) said at beginning of our debate, half a loaf rather than the whole loaf that they would have preferred. I hope, however, that my right hon. Friend and others accept that in offering what I think is more than a half loaf—but let us not quibble about fractions—we are laying a path for the regulation of the industry that will achieve the important functions set out in the Bill.

We have listened to arguments on a number of topics. We do not agree with all of them, but we acknowledge them and the effectiveness and constructiveness with which they have been moved. We believe that the Bill is a flexible measure. It contains the ability to address every one of the points that have been the source of criticism during its passage. For example, it can address the criticism that it does not regulate enough sectors as new sectors can be brought into regulation by secondary legislation. The criticism that we are not making the approved contractor scheme compulsory can be addressed by regulation if necessary.

We have accepted some sensible proposals—if this is not an oxymoron—from the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. In particular, the Bill has improved provisions relating to appeal procedures from SIA decisions, appeals to magistrates courts and the use of powers of entry and inspection.

I want to pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South, whose contributions in Committee were both knowledgeable and passionate. As he knows, and no doubt will comment on in his speech, we did not agree with everything that he had to say, but I am sure that he will continue to influence the development of the SIA, and that the spirit that he set of an independent authority that regulates the industry in a way that not only improves its standards but drives out criminality will be the central watchword as it develops.

I should also like to thank Opposition spokespersons and right hon. and hon. Members from all parties who served on the Standing Committee. We considered the Bill in a constructive and positive manner. I should also like to thank my officials who have given me such effective advice throughout the passage of the Bill. With that, I commend the Bill to the House.

7.33 pm

Mr. Hawkins: The Minister has been very brief in his summary of the Bill, which, as he rightly says, has been the subject of constructive debate on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report. I agree with the tributes that he paid to the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). Everyone who has been involved in the Bill and has heard the detailed speeches that the right hon. Gentleman made on Second Reading, in many of the debates in Committee and once again today on Report pays tribute to his expertise and longevity in dealing with this issue. I think that he said that he has introduced no fewer than seven private Member's Bills on the subject during some 25 years in the House. No doubt the discussions between the right hon. Gentleman and the Minister about whether the Bill is half a loaf, which is better than no bread at all, rather than the full loaf that the right hon. Gentleman was asking for will continue when the right hon. Gentleman contributes to this debate.

I was fascinated by the Minister's description of his fellow Norwich City supporter, Delia Smith, when discussing culinary matters. We all have our favourite football teams and we all have our favourite dishes, but one thing that might unite us all is a great respect for Delia Smith and her skills as a practitioner of the culinary arts. Speaking as someone who cooked one of Delia Smith's recipes as recently as last night, I have particular reason to be grateful for her skilful direction. However, I cannot share her fascination or that of the Minister with that particular football club.

I agree with the Minister that the Bill is not perfect. Opposition Members would say that the Bill is undercooked rather than properly cooked—

Mr. Bercow: Half-baked.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend says that it is half-baked, but that is a little unfair.

There have been constructive debates throughout the passage of the Bill. On Third Reading it is important to recognise that if the new Security Industry Authority works properly it will deal with the serious abuses of the so-called cowboy wheelclampers. I hope that it will also deal with the massive problem that I have highlighted in many debates in the House: the involvement of bouncers on the doors of pubs and clubs in the appalling illicit drug trade. We have all heard of cases where night club

[Mr. Hawkins]

bouncers have supplied the most dangerous drugs to young people, with tragic consequences. One remembers the appalling case of Leah Betts with particular poignancy when one considers the number of young people who have died as a result of being supplied with drugs by night club bouncers. I see that the Minister agrees. We all recognise that serious issues are involved.

We have had our reservations about whether the authority will be over-bureaucratic and whether it will work properly in practice. We had particular concerns that were addressed earlier this afternoon, including our fear that the Bill will not operate properly in relation to the IT security industry. Those doubts and concerns remain, but today we are prepared to give the Bill and the potential new authority the benefit of the doubt, although will want to keep it under scrutiny.

I have no doubt that the points that have been made by, among others, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and me about the need for continuing parliamentary scrutiny of the authority's work and for more issues to be dealt with by way of an affirmative resolution will continue to be live issues.

I do not want to detain the House unduly. At this stage we are prepared to give the new authority a fair wind, with the proviso that we will keep the matter carefully under review. We hope that it will work in the way that the Minister and those who advise him believe it will. We have our fears and concerns, but let us see how it works in practice. I will listen with great interest to the other contributions to the debate.

7.38 pm

Mr. Bruce George: This speech will be short, for no other reason than I am due at a dinner at the American embassy to meet the "wise men" who have been sent over to persuade the British Government about national missile defence. I remain to be convinced, but I may just about make it in time for pudding.

Despite being Welsh, I am not a particularly emotional person, but I am very happy because, at long last, the private security industry is about to be regulated. Those in the industry will be the winners. They have not always realised that regulation would make them winners, but it will because it will give them something that they have been denied by their own indifference and hostility to regulation over the years. The Bill will give the industry a reputation that it can be proud of. Its previous bad reputation was deserved, because many of its members did not meet the standards set in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, which have eagerly embraced regulation.

International companies operating in a regulated environment elsewhere encountered no problems, and I feel rather sorry about their experience in this country, where the prevailing standards are depressing. Here, an absence of training is the norm, and the public's attitude to the security industry is a combination of mirth, hostility and indifference.

That will change, and not only as a result of this long-overdue legislation. The market has changed, technology has moved forward and crime levels have risen. The police realise that they must work with technology produced in the private sector and with an industry to which they can relate. In the past, the police were the professionals and the private security industry, in some sectors, was anti-professional.

This is a good day, and, as no further amendments have been tabled, the House of Lords can do nothing to injure the Bill. I do not believe that that would be what the other place would want, but we are at the beginning of a process of metamorphosis.

The process of transformation of the police in this country began in 1829 and it took 40 years before the new police force was in existence throughout the kingdom. I am sure that 2001 will be seen in a comparable light, and considered to be the date which the private security industry began the real process of reform. That process will not be completed overnight. It will not be complete even when the regulatory authority puts in place the new standards envisaged in the subordinate legislation. It will take some time, but the process is seriously beginning.

There has been much use of bread metaphors this afternoon. Having seen the consultative paper and the Bill, I believe that sliced bread is the appropriate term, as some of the contents of the consultative document have been sliced away. The loaf has thereby been diminished, but I hope that it will expand.

I began campaigning on this matter in 1975. My wife compelled me to clear out the garage, which had been unable to accommodate a motor vehicle since 1972. I knew that there was a big sack containing my material on the private security industry. The state of the Labour party in the 1980s, under the previous Government, made me think that it would be some time before regulation on the private security industry was introduced, so the sack was near the back of the garage.

When I opened it, it was like opening a time capsule. There I was—slim, fit and single, with much more hair than I have now. The paper was pink with age and some of it disintegrated in my hands. I looked at the debates from those early years. Had I realised that it would take a quarter of century to introduce measures establishing a regulated, accountable, efficient private security industry—measures that I considered to be inevitable and necessary—I probably would have thrown in the towel a long time ago.

Many private Members' Bills to regulate the industry, in whole or in part, have been introduced over the years. The list of sponsors contains the names of people who are either dead or long forgotten—Gardiner, Walden, Huckfield, Fowler, Fiddler, B. George, Lord Willis, Dixon, D., B. George, J. Wheeler, B. George, Michael Stern, B. George., and my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey).

Many people have been supportive all along, including Group 4 and many medium-sized and small companies in the sector. The International Professional Security Association, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Institute of Security Management, the regulatory bodies representing the private security industry and the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union have also been positive. Long-standing friends include Peter Heims, Peter Jones and John Smith of the Prudential. They made me realise that some people in the private security industry shared my views.

Many others, however, continued to fight a guerrilla war. Until 1997, they included officials and Ministers at the Home Office, large private security companies whose names I will not mention, and the associations representing them. In recent years, an incredible homogeneity has been evident. Opponents realised that the game was up and that it was in their interests as well as the public's to bring what is an enormous industry into the orbit of a regulatory system.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that the Bill is not the final version of the legislation. That may never be achieved. Instead, the Bill is the start of a rolling programme of improvement. We know what the deficiencies are—the lack of regulation of companies, the absence of regulations covering in-house security, and so on—and we have spoken about them often. However, I share the hope of many hon. Members that, in the course of the next couple of years, more sectors will be added to the regime.

The iron law of bureaucracy should not be imposed, but many bodies want to be regulated. They include the Master Locksmiths Association, the body representing the better end of the alarm system sector, and companies operating security shredding or storage services.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many members of the wheelclamping industry believe that the time is now right for regulation, to ensure that people will not suffer as they have in the past?

Mr. George: I know that my hon. Friend has fought hard to have wheelclamping regulated. I did not mention it because I have never considered the wheelclamping industry to be part of the private security industry. However, the more the merrier: people who want to join the regulation regime should write to my hon. Friend the Minister of State before he leaves office.

It is ironic that wheelclamping should be regarded as part of the private security industry, many members of which will stay on the outside, looking in. That will remain the case until subordinate legislation is introduced.

I should like to thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State, with whom I have had many constructive meetings. My thanks go also to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who in the past has had to sit through many lectures on the subject. Opposition Members are lucky to have come to the debate rather late in the day. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary sat through my endless and futile attempts to convince the previous Government's Home Office Ministers and officials of the need to regulate the private security industry. I am deeply grateful to everyone who has contributed.

The hon. Members for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) have said some kind things, and I thank them. The Standing Committee was useful, and I am indebted to the hon. Gentlemen for their willingness to tolerate long speeches and to join in the spirit of near consensus on the Bill. That spirit is not unique, but it is fairly rare. That is particularly the case in the matter of crime and policing, which, at a public level, is divisive.

The passing of the Bill will be greeted by me and the industry with satisfaction, but it is not the end of the matter. Should the Minister of State be transferred to the Ministry of Defence, I warn him that, like Hannibal Lecter, who pops up in a variety of guises, I will be there to greet him at one of the first inquiries of the Defence Committee, which will be a long one into policing and security in the MOD.

The security industry is being transformed. Many bad companies will get out now and take their money and run, as those involved—who have serious criminal records—will never get past the regulatory authority. Their companies will not be able to meet the standards. I have mentioned the growth in technology, and it is an exciting time for the industry. The future is not just in the hands of the Home Office and the SIA, but in the hands of the industry. My interest in the matter will survive.

There has been talk of football teams, and Coventry City has had a bad time. Among Coventry's famous sons are the group, the Police; I think they were from Coventry. To paraphrase one of their famous songs—which I did not realise until years later was about stalking—"Every move you make, every step you take, we'll be watching you." That applies to whoever will be sitting in the Minister's place one month from now.

I am delighted that we have reached this point and I hope that the security industry will feel reasonably satisfied with our work. Finally, I thank my research collaborator, Mark Button, for all his work in bringing the interests of the private security industry before a wider audience. We have done a pretty good job of work and I look forward to the years ahead.

7.52 pm

Jackie Ballard: The right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) is right to be proud of the role that he has played in bringing regulation to the private security industry. The House and the public will be grateful to him for not throwing in the towel over the many years that he has been involved.

Many hon. Members have spoken about football teams; I do not see the reason for that, but I do not want to be left out. That gives me a good excuse—in what will probably be my last speech of this Parliament—to congratulate the players of Taunton Town, who won the FA Vase on Sunday, playing at Aston Villa. I was there to watch them win it; the first live football match I have ever watched. They lost the trophy when the town had a Conservative Member, so it is a good omen that they have won it now.

Congratulations have been given to the right hon. Member for Walsall, South and the Government on the Bill, which has been in gestation for more than 20 years. There seems to be a greater need for security measures and operatives in all our lives, whether it is CCTV, burglar alarms, clubs and shop door staff or security patrols on housing estates. I have grave doubts about some of those roles—which should be matters for police forces—being taken over by the private security industry.

As has been said, the Liberal Democrats broadly welcome the Bill, although we have some lingering dismay that not all our helpful amendments were accepted by the Minister. They were helpful, particularly the proposal to include in-house operatives within the regulations—a matter to which the right hon. Member for Walsall, South drew attention. I suspect that that may find its way into the Bill at some point.

The Minister said that the Bill was flexible, and it is a framework Bill. We share the view of the official Opposition that it is important that the House is able to

[Jackie Ballard]

scrutinise the application of that flexibility in future. I hope that the SIA will be truly representative of all the legitimate and relevant sectors of the industry and will have the powers and ability to scrutinise effectively an industry that, in the past, has often attracted the wrong sort of people who, far from making people feel more secure, have made them feel very insecure.

I suspect that there will not be a vote on the Third Reading of the Bill. If there were, I would urge my colleagues to vote for it.

7.56 pm

Mr. Bercow: Others have kept their contributions short; so will I. I congratulated the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) earlier, and having extended a bouquet to him I will spare him the embarrassment or indignity of further unwarranted and excessive effusions from me. Suffice it to say that everybody is aware of his expertise on the subject and everybody respects the dedication with which he has pursued issues and causes that are dear to his heart. The right hon. Gentleman is pleased with the Bill, and I hope that his expectation of its efficacy will be justified. If it is, it will be in the interests of the sector as a whole and of those who have reason to have contact or interaction with the private security industry.

In essence, a number of key areas are relevant to the sector that is covered by the Bill and of concern to those who scrutinise its contents. First, there is the key issue—what might be described as the macro-subject—of the Security Industry Authority; not only the powers and functions that are conferred upon it, but the way in which it is composed. We discussed these matters in reasonable detail on Second Reading and in Committee. The jury is out to an extent on whether—and, if so, to what extent—Government thinking and decisions on the matters reflect the spirit and content of our exchanges. Suffice it to say that there is a recognition that the authority needs to draw on the experience of the private security industry itself. If it were to fail to do so, it would not be adequately informed in the exercise of its powers.

On the other hand, it is important that people of ability and good intent who do not have a background in the private security industry but might have a capacity to offer an alternative view should have the chance to do so. One does not want the functions of the authority to suffer, however inadvertently, from the existence of what might be considered to be a parallax view; that is to say, the domination or exclusivity of a view that is drawn only from those who work in the industry. The Minister assured us in Committee that it was the intention to have a broad range of people. I hope that people will not be appointed to the authority by way of the offer of a bauble, but because they have ability, competence and good will. I am happy to give the Government the benefit of the doubt on that point and I hope that our best expectations and justified hopes for the composition of the authority will be reflected in due course.

A second important issue is the licensing and approval regime, including the provision for appeals and representations in relation thereto. We knocked these issues around by way of a game of legislative table tennis. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) and I—as well as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who is not in his place today but who contributed to the Committee—still have concerns about the way in which the Government intend to proceed. Nevertheless, Ministers made their case, and I hope that it will be borne out by the evidence of the efficacy of the Bill.

The fact that the Government and Opposition differ in their opinions serves only to underline the importance of the publication of findings and the opportunity for all Members of Parliament to come to a conclusion about whether the authority and the Bill have been effective in the first year. I hope that such opportunities will arise in the months ahead. The efficacy and transparency of the licensing regime will be important.

A third consideration is equally important—that of equity. We do not want the legislation to be a blunt instrument that over-eggs the pudding. It should not trample over the legitimate rights of people employed in the industry, or those who deal with them, in order to achieve its objectives. The legislation must be proportionate at the same time as being effective.

There is a legitimate debate about who should be included under the rubric of the Bill, and the right hon. Member for Walsall, South—we defer to the strength of his long experience—believes that other sectors should be subject to the Bill's provisions in future. We shall wait and see. I do not necessarily disagree with the right hon. Gentleman, nor with the present stance of the Government, but in practice the hopes held out for a measure and the words the Government use to justify their position often differ from the evidence of the practical impact of the legislation.

The Government have made a case for regulation of the private security industry. They are also able to invoke as ballast in support of their case the fact that most of the sector wants some regulation. However, I hope that the Minister will accept that just as not all of the large employers in that 350,000-employee industry are good, not all the small operators are bad. Some of the small operators would like to grow and it is therefore important to keep a proper focus on the balance between efficacy and zeal. Small companies should not be so smothered in excessive regulation that they do not have an opportunity to develop their legitimate commercial activities.

My final concern is the way in which the powers of entry and inspection will be implemented. Without those powers, the Bill would not have any practical effect if people could not inspect on behalf of the authority to discover whether companies were respecting its provisions. However, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) observed earlier, it is important that the powers are equitably enforced. People should not be intimidated by excessive inquiry or over-zealous interference by public authorities. Defences should be built and protection provided. The guilty should be apprehended and punished, but the innocent should be left to go about their lawful business, consistent with the principles of a liberal and pluralist democracy.

My concerns are reflected in the 25-odd clauses of the Bill, and the jury is out on how effective those provisions will be. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden wish the Bill well. We have a duty to maintain a certain critical and dispassionate distance from the

Government on the subject and, in a fair spirit, to remind Ministers that, in the end, they will be judged on the evidence. I hope that the Bill will be effective and that people will judge this activity of Parliament as having been worth while.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

ASYLUM

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 13119/00, a Commission Communication on a Common Asylum Procedure and Uniform Status for Persons Granted Asylum; and supports the Government's active participation in the debate on the Communication and the Government's intention to participate in measures which would lead to the establishment of a common European asylum system, without undermining the integrity of the UK's frontier control.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

FINANCIAL SERVICES

That the Financial Services Act 1986 (Extension of Scope of Act and Meaning of Collective Investment Scheme) Order 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 1421), dated 10th April 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th April, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Dyslexia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

8.6 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I am honoured to have secured this Adjournment debate on such an important subject. There is an element of circularity in that what is probably my last speech in this Parliament is on education, because my first action in the Chamber after being elected was to ask a question of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and my maiden speech was in the debate on the Bill to end the assisted places scheme and reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds; so it seems right that my last contribution in this Parliament should be on education for people with dyslexia.

The Prime Minister promised that the first three priorities for this Government would be education, education, education. A child goes through education only once. Anything not done right in that time will stay with that child for the rest of his or her life. That is why it is so important that we get education right first time. It is even more important that we get it right for people with special needs such as dyslexia.

So what is dyslexia? I am grateful to the British Dyslexia Association, and particularly its policy director Carol Orton, for a briefing for this debate. The British Dyslexia Association is based in my constituency and further information about it, dyslexia and the support available can be found at www.bda-dyslexia.org. The word "dyslexia" comes from Greek and means difficulty with words. It involves a difference in the part of the brain that deals with language—it affects the underlying skills that are needed for learning to read, write and spell. More and more evidence has been gathered from brain-imaging techniques showing that dyslexic people process information differently from other people. That is particularly important and there is much more to be learned about what is and is not dyslexia, together with how it happens.

Around 4 per cent. of the population are severely dyslexic. A further 6 per cent. have mild to moderate problems. The recent Moser report found that 7 million adults had poor basic skills, many as a result of dyslexia, although many of them might not know it, having never been diagnosed. Dyslexia occurs in people from all backgrounds and of all abilities, from people who cannot read or write to those with university degrees. Dyslexic people of all ages can learn effectively but often need a different approach to learning.

Dyslexia is a puzzling mix of both difficulties and strengths. It varies in degree and from person to person. Dyslexic people often have distinctive talents as well as typical clusters of difficulties. Examples of difficulties include reading hesitantly; misreading, which makes understanding difficult; problems with sequences, such as getting dates in order; poor organisation or time management; difficulty in organising thoughts clearly; and erratic spelling. Examples of the possible strengths include innovative thinking; excellent troubleshooting; intuitive problem solving; being creative in many different ways; and lateral thinking.

The range of difficulties and strengths, along with the possible difference for different people, is part of what makes dyslexia difficult to detect. There has also been a

[Jane Griffiths]

reluctance for far too long among educationists to accept the existence of dyslexia. Too many were reluctant to accept it because they thought that middle-class parents would claim that their child was dyslexic when in reality the child was simply not as clever as they would like.

My experience as a Member of Parliament, as well as as a councillor before that, confirms that there are indeed parents who will claim dyslexia in such circumstances, but I would contend that a child's comparative achievements should be dealt with honestly, and I think that the growth of testing has helped enormously with that. The problem should not lead to a denial of the existence of dyslexia.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate on a very important issue. Only yesterday, I spoke to Mr. Jordan, an optometrist in my constituency, who has been undertaking research involving 5,000 people in the United Kingdom over a period of 10 years. He believes that there is a way of measuring visual dyslexia. He and his colleagues have developed programmes that will be useful for teachers, including tests for visual reversals and a CD-ROM for teachers. If I forwarded that information to her and indeed to Ministers would they take it on board and examine it carefully?

Jane Griffiths: I warmly welcome what is clearly innovative research being done in the hon. Lady's constituency. I would be very glad to be furnished with information to help to make progress in research and development on this important subject.

It is important to identify dyslexia early. If it is identified early, support can be put in place so that a dyslexic child learns to its full capacity, just like any other child. If dyslexia is left unidentified, the child will have difficulties learning and will not develop to its full potential. In more extreme cases, which may be more numerous than we know, the inability to learn will result in the child switching off from education and from society, leading to disruption in school, to truancy and possibly to involvement in crime.

Angela Devlin, a prison visitor and researcher, found high levels of dyslexia in the prison population, which she considered both a symptom and a major cause of the prisoners' condition. That shows graphically why it is so important to get it right first time. Baseline assessment exists to assess how children perform when they enter school, but it will not normally identify children at risk of developing literacy difficulties because of dyslexia. Some schools use dyslexia screening tests so that they can pick up potential problems as soon as possible.

An audit was carried out for the BDA last summer by Members of Parliament during their school visits. It was admittedly not a scientific survey, but it covered 473 schools so it is worthy of note. It showed that only 11 per cent. of respondents had any formal procedures in place to identify dyslexia. A worrying 26 per cent. felt that they could not give specific help until the local authority educational psychologist had formally identified the child as dyslexic. Many pointed out how few visits they received from the educational psychologist and said that they had to prioritise what happened in those visits.

How many dyslexic children are still not being diagnosed, are being misdiagnosed or are being offered unsuitable provision? Are there any plans to standardise and distribute an assessment for dyslexia?

The literacy hours have been a great success and there has clearly been a significant improvement in literacy among children, but dyslexic children have fundamental difficulties with remembering and understanding sounds, and because the literacy hour moves fairly fast they can easily be left behind. How can we ensure that any falling behind is investigated long before it seriously affects self-esteem and causes frustration?

Too often, dyslexia is still seen as simply a reading problem, which means that children are being punished for dyslexic characteristics such as untidy handwriting or not listening, when in fact they have not been able to process language at speed and have been humiliated by the teacher's insisting that they read aloud in class, or even, in some cases, that they read out their work phonetically. We do not want such practices to continue.

The Department for Education and Employment has funded the printing of 35,000 dyslexia-friendly schools resource packs. That is a very positive and inclusive move, but it requires a proactive approach, which is too often missing. What steps will the Government take to ensure that similar policies are taken on board? I have heard about too many schools that are reluctant to admit children with dyslexia.

I am pleased to have had the chance to raise this important issue. I would like to summarise the points. They are: identifying dyslexia early; the impact on dyslexic people of the literacy hour; understanding dyslexia; and dyslexia-friendly schools.

A child goes through education only once. That is why it is important that we get it right and that intervention happens early. I have ambition for all our children. I have ambition that the potential of all our children is fulfilled though the education system. I do not want anyone to be held back—that is why ambition is so important: deliver help for children with dyslexia, deliver ambition to all our children.

8.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Jacqui Smith): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) on securing this debate. Dyslexia is an important subject which the Government take very seriously. It affects 4 per cent. of the population, with a further 6 per cent. displaying some dyslexia traits, with the effects that my hon. Friend ably and clearly outlined in her thoughtful speech.

I assure my hon. Friend and the House of the Government's awareness of dyslexia and specific learning difficulties, which is in no small part due to the positive and constructive working relationships that we have with organisations that support children and adults with dyslexia, such as the British Dyslexia Association, the Dyslexia Institute and the Adult Dyslexia Organisation.

The Government's drive to raise educational standards has to be seen in the context of our wider efforts to work towards an inclusive society and an inclusive education system. An important part of that is ensuring that special educational needs are recognised and acted on as early as possible. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his foreword to the booklet for the recent British Dyslexia Association conference in York, we must strive to ensure that children with special educational needs are not sidelined. All children must be helped to achieve their full potential.

The recently published Green Paper affirms that we need to have high expectations of such pupils, to tailor the curriculum to their needs and to ensure that teaching challenges and stretches them. My hon. Friend spoke about the importance and centrality of the national literacy strategy, which was one of the first steps that the Government took to achieve their goal of an inclusive education system with high standards for all. It is intended to raise standards for all children, including those with special educational needs.

The national literacy strategy has at its heart the concept of inclusion. We have some evidence that the literacy strategy is benefiting pupils with special educational needs, including those with dyslexia. Ofsted's report on the second year of the national literacy strategy confirmed that, in line with its inclusive philosophy, very few pupils with SEN are withdrawn from the literacy hour and that specific support for pupils with SEN was in almost all cases satisfactory.

An essential element of the literacy strategy is the training and support provided to schools. We have produced materials that support the national curriculum 2000 statement on inclusion and give teachers practical advice on including pupils with SEN effectively in the literacy hour.

Our training file "Supporting Pupils with SEN in the Literacy Hour" contains detailed guidance on the practical application of strategies for inclusion, the role of the teaching assistant and, with the help of the BDA, some specific guidelines on providing for pupils with specific learning difficulties.

Mrs. Ewing: I hear all that the Minister says, but there is a need to support teachers to ensure that they understand the complexities of dyslexia. Is any money being allocated to ensure that teachers receive such training at college before they are placed in schools?

Jacqui Smith: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention, and I shall deal with precisely that point in a moment.

A variety of methods exists to help children catch up, and they are included in the literacy strategy, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East correctly said, the priority must be not to let children fall behind. All too often, the parents of dyslexic children have told me that it is not good enough to wait until a child has fallen behind before recognising that there is a problem. That is why we have piloted a year 1 intervention strategy—early literacy support—in 40 local education authorities during the current school year, and we will extend the strategy on a national basis from this financial year.

Evidence from the pilot scheme suggests that we can reduce the number of children encountering significant difficulties with literacy at the end of year 1, by a combination of extra training, the careful screening of children against literacy objectives and additional, daily, small-group literacy support for identified children from a trained teaching assistant.

As the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has said, it is, of course, particularly important that teachers are aware of the needs of children who have, or may be at risk of developing, special educational needs of any kind. That is why, since 1998, to secure qualified teacher status—in other words, during initial teacher training—students must demonstrate that they can identify pupils with SEN, that they know where to get help so that they can give positive and targeted support and that they are familiar with the SEN code of practice.

Those arrangements are further reinforced by the induction period arrangements that all teachers must undertake, and opportunities for in-service training also need to be provided for teachers once they are in post. That is why, in 2001-02, under the Department's standards fund programme, we are supporting expenditure of £82 million on SEN and envisage that £30 million of that sum will be spent on training and professional development. Although LEAs are responsible for determining precisely how that money is spent, I certainly would expect in-post training in recognising and dealing with dyslexia to be included for staff.

As I suggested earlier, we are also actively working with the voluntary organisations to raise awareness. For example, with the BDA, we jointly developed a poster providing hints for primary school teachers to help them identify those pupils with dyslexia. As my hon. Friend said, we have also provided a grant to help the BDA produce a schools resource pack, called "Achieving dyslexia friendly schools", and we have recently agreed funding to reprint that as well. The pack promotes a whole-school approach to supporting pupils with dyslexia and provides examples of best practice.

We also want to play an active part in research on dyslexia. Together with the National Lottery Charities Board and W. H. Smith, we are funding a two-year "Spell It"—which stands for study programme to evaluate literacy learning through individualised tuition—research project, run by the Dyslexia Institute, to evaluate the effects of structured programmes of intervention. The project is targeted at seven-year-old pupils who are experiencing specific difficulties in learning to read, write and spell. Two key elements of the project are to develop activities that parents can do at home—parents are often keen and able to support their children—and to share the knowledge and skills of specialist teachers more widely. The results of that research are expected in 2002.

My hon. Friend rightly identified the key issue—the early identification of special educational needs and dyslexia in the early years of education. Such early identification and early intervention to support those needs are a critical part of the Government's programme to raise standards. We are taking a number of steps to reinforce SEN structures in the early years. First, the introduction of the foundation stage of the national curriculum and the early learning goals in September 2000, alongside the significant expansion in places for three and four-year-olds, is an important part of the programme. The foundation stage guidance, published last May, is designed to help all early years settings to create inclusive learning environments and to support early identification and appropriate intervention.

Again, we are focusing on the need to ensure that practitioners are trained, and we have set ambitious targets for early years and child care development partnerships, which are responsible locally for the strategy, to provide

[Jacqui Smith]

high-quality early education and child care places. The targets that we have set them cover the next three financial years and include establishing SEN co-ordinators in every registered early years setting by 2002; providing three days relevant training for every one of those SEN co-ordinators by 2004; and establishing a network of area co-ordinators to work with early years settings in the non-maintained sector, to provide expert advice and support. Significant funds are being provided to help carry forward that agenda.

My hon. Friend also rightly raised the important issue of baseline assessment. Baseline assessment can be a useful first screen. It helps teachers to consolidate their knowledge about pupils and devise strategies to follow up and meet any needs they may have. It also helps them to identify children whose needs may require further assessment and intervention, including those with dyslexia, if that has not been done already.

Although baseline assessment was not devised primarily to identify SEN, research into the current 90 local schemes shows that about two thirds of schools use it effectively as an early warning of learning needs, perhaps signposting a need for further screening, but there are differences between schemes. That is one of the reasons why we recently asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to consult on proposals for a national scheme for baseline assessment at the end of the foundation stage, to replace the current local schemes for the 2002-03 school year. The responses to that consultation are currently being analysed.

We believe that a national scheme would enable quality and consistency to be improved. It would build on the best features of successful local schemes, including pointers to raise awareness of phonological and language difficulties which indicate reading difficulties later on. It would also allow children with particular needs for intervention, such as dyslexia, to be identified before literacy and numeracy sessions begin in year 1.

The consultation document also asked whether and how baseline assessment could be used specifically to help to improve the early identification of special educational needs. As my hon. Friend pointed out, that is a complicated area. There are of course many questions as to how baseline assessment might relate to the code of practice, to the early years provision that I outlined and to school-based provision. I have been especially keen to pursue answers to those questions, and am keen to work with any organisations which have ideas for such early identification.

We have considered other avenues of early diagnosis and intervention that can be pursued. We recently announced funding of £100,000 to support work by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency at Farnborough, the Royal Berkshire hospital and the laboratory of physiology at Oxford university, through the Dyslexia Research Trust, on the development of a new diagnostic aid for childhood dyslexia. The objective of the project is to design a prototype, child-friendly eye movement and tracking system that may enable early detection of childhood dyslexia. That is a particularly interesting project, combining as it does the existing world of fast-jet technology with research expertise in understanding the physiological bases of childhood dyslexia.

In conclusion, I again thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue. I reassure her that the Government put both high standards for all children and the inclusion of all children at the centre of their education policies. We shall continue to work with partners to ensure that children with dyslexia are identified early and are given the best possible opportunity to develop to their full potential.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 9 May 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Organised Crime

1. **Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): If he will make a statement on further measures being taken to fight organised crime in Northern Ireland. [159615]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Government and the operational agencies in Northern Ireland are committed to tackling the problem of organised crime. Since September last year, I have led a multi-agency taskforce involving the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Customs and other Government agencies. Our remit is to confront the malign influence of organised crime wherever it raises its ugly head. The taskforce has already published an analysis of the problem and a strategy for tackling it. A copy of those documents can be found in the Library.

Mrs. Ellman: Does my right hon. Friend consider that the new Criminal Assets Recovery Agency has sufficient power to fight organised crime? When does he expect it to show that it has made a difference?

Mr. Ingram: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. The Government's proposals are set out in the recently published Proceeds of Crime Bill. When enacted, it will go a long way towards dealing with the twin evils of racketeering and drug pushing. As experience here, in the United States, the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere has shown, the seizure of illegal assets can help to destroy or to undermine the hold that organised crime has on many parts of society. The legislation will help to achieve all those objectives.

Mr. Cecil Walker (Belfast, North): The Minister must be aware that the RUC is now seriously under strength in terms of both experience and manpower. Given the high level of interest in the recruitment programme, will he consider increasing the number of people to be recruited, which is 240 at present?

Mr. Ingram: That is an interesting point. Although I do not accept the premise on which the question is based, all of us have been surprised by the level of interest that has been shown in the new Police Service of Northern Ireland—there have been just under 8,000 applicants to date, all of whom are being assessed. Clearly, we must look at ways in which we can, if it is possible and practical, improve policing numbers in Northern Ireland as a result of that recruitment. The initial tranche of 240 is being considered. Of course, that will be increased in subsequent years.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Does the Minister agree that there are organisations in Northern Ireland engaging in Mafia-style activity which want the absence of law and order to continue in order that they can develop their trade, particularly that in drugs, threatening our young people? Does not that underline the fact that all of us should do everything in our power as soon as possible after the elections to ensure that we have a police service on our streets that has the loyalty and support of all sections of our people in order to deal with such situations?

Mr. Ingram: The point raised by my hon. Friend goes to the heart of the issue. Some of what we have to deal with is a consequence of moving out of a terrorist-driven society to, I hope, a more normalised society. The taskforce that I mentioned earlier has reported that there are 78 organised criminal gangs in Northern Ireland, involving about 400 individuals. The strategy that the Government have put in place with the RUC and other law-enforcement agencies will tackle that with great vigour, but they cannot do it on their own. As my hon. Friend has said, they need the support of the wider community. The best approach is when everyone joins the police service and the law-enforcement agencies, not only in tackling organised crime but in helping to bring in normalised policing in Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House should consider that many hon. Members are here to listen to Northern Ireland questions.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): Does not the Minister agree that the fight against organised crime is hardly helped by the European Court of Human Rights awarding in favour of people who set out to blow up a police station? Is it not demoralising to our security forces?

Mr. Ingram: I should have thought that even in their current state the Opposition would recognise that that was a judgment of a court of law, which the Government have to take into account and study very carefully. That is what we are doing. The case is not related to organised crime. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will help the Government to tackle that insidious and evil aspect of society in Northern Ireland.

Good Friday Agreement

2. **Mr. Jeff Ennis** (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): If he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Good Friday agreement. [159616]

3. **Ms Helen Southworth** (Warrington, South): If he will make a statement on progress of the peace process. [159617]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): Over the past three years, the agreement has helped to improve overall the lives of the people of Northern Ireland. Further progress will depend on their continued active support for that agreement.

Mr. Ennis: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Good Friday agreement belongs not to the politicians or to the Government, but to the people of Northern Ireland? Is it not important that all sides involved in the agreement ensure that the will of the people prevails?

Dr. Reid: I congratulate the politicians who have had the moral courage to support the agreement, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. I also agree with my hon. Friend that, ultimately, the beneficiaries and owners of the agreement are the people of Northern Ireland as a whole. It is they who would be the victims of the failure of the agreement. We are approaching a general election that will be very important for people in Northern Ireland, and they will make their choice in that election. However, I think that an overwhelming number of objective observers would recognise that, for all its difficulties, Northern Ireland today is a safer, fairer, better and more prosperous place than it was before the previous general election.

Ms Southworth: My right hon. Friend knows that my constituents in Warrington have good reason to understand the desire of ordinary people in Northern Ireland to be free from terrorism, and that we have been working to support ordinary people in Northern Ireland in their struggle for peace. Does he believe that, in the coming weeks, it is the responsibility of every politician in every party to commit to the peace process and to work to ensure its success?

Dr. Reid: I agree with every word that my hon. Friend said. Not only is the situation in Northern Ireland one of the longest-running problems in British history, but it is quite literally a matter of life and death for so many people. More than 3,600 families have tragically suffered a loss over the period of the troubles. I commend my hon. Friend on the role that she has played in Warrington following the tragic deaths there of Tim Parry and Jonathan Ball, as I do the centre that has been established. I think that we would all do well to emulate her example and those of many people in Northern Ireland who have overcome past enmities to build a better future.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State will be aware that on 2 May, in reply to a question, the Minister of State said that the decommissioning body had issued a statement on 22 March, stating that it believed that there had been progress towards decommissioning. However, in that statement, the decommissioning body also set an eight-week deadline. We are now within that eight-week period, which gives us until the end of June to try to make up ground. Is the Secretary of State in a better position today to tell us whether there has been real movement, or whether we are still being fobbed off?

Dr. Reid: I am afraid that I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that I have received any further reports from General de Chastelain or his commission. Last year, at Hillsborough, it was made plain by both Governments and by all the parties that we hoped and expected that we would be able to move towards substantial implementation of all aspects of the agreement by June. That remains our goal and our objective.

I think that there should be a clear recognition not only by every Member in this place but by everyone outside it that, if we are to move forwards in this peace process, we all have to move forward together. Progress cannot be made by one side or another side attempting to win a victory. Defeat for one side means defeat for the process. We all have to move forwards together, or, quite frankly, we will all fall back into the abyss together.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Does the Secretary of State accept that, although we talk about the progress of the peace process for the people of Northern Ireland, large sections of working-class people in public housing estates in Northern Ireland are daily subjected to paramilitary terror from paramilitaries who are inextricably linked to the parties within the agreement and alleged to be supporting that peace process?

Dr. Reid: I utterly condemn any violence, whether it comes from individuals, organised crime or those who would inflict damage, violence and misery upon their neighbours under the greater name of some alleged cause on either side of the communities there. As regards the vast majority of people, including those in the working-class areas to which the hon. and learned Gentleman referred, I put it to him that, despite all the difficulties, the current situation is immeasurably better than it was a few years ago. He shakes his head, so perhaps he does not recognise that there has been a cut of almost 20 per cent. in unemployment and a 29 per cent. cut in long-term unemployment in Northern Ireland, and that we have had £2 billion in new investment. We have almost quadrupled our tourism, too, and we have a sense of security that, although imperfect, is far better than it was.

I am the last to pretend that we have a perfect situation in Northern Ireland, but the choice is not between a perfect Northern Ireland and what we have; it is between what we have today and what we had a few short years ago. The situation now is a vast improvement for the vast majority of people.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I agree with the Secretary of State that there has been an enormous change in Northern Ireland over the past few years as a result of the Good Friday agreement and the peace process. Does he agree, however, that there are several major issues yet to be resolved—decommissioning to put weapons beyond use, policing and the review of the legal system? The most important of those is that weapons be seen to be beyond paramilitary use.

Will the Secretary of State also join me in regretting the tendering, albeit provisional, of his resignation by the First Minister, from 1 July, predicated on that issue? Does he agree that the whole delicate edifice built up over the years is in danger of collapsing because of that action?

Dr. Reid: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, despite the progress that we have made, there are some difficult and important issues that we still have to address.

Those include bridging the gap on policing to create a police service that is accepted by and participated in by both sides of the community, the full working of the institutions and the Executive, normalisation on the part of the Government, and decommissioning. I can think of no aspect of the agreement that would reassure the Unionist community more than some progress on decommissioning.

As for the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), the right hon. Gentleman has made his own decision. It is one for him to make, but I would regret it very much if he removed himself from the process at any stage. I believe that his contribution has been enormous, and that not only his personal contribution but that of the Executive of which he is First Minister are a central part of the progress that we have made.

Dr. William McCrea (South Antrim): The Secretary of State will agree that the people of Northern Ireland will make a judgment on the Belfast agreement very shortly, and that this Government, like any other, will have to give heed to the will of the people. By way of guidance to the people of Northern Ireland in their consideration, can he inform the people of what was actually agreed at Hillsborough? Was it agreed that the decommissioning of terrorist arms would be concluded by June 2001, commenced by then, or just talked about by then? Mr. Ahern says that the British Government have now decided to give de Chastelain up to February 2002. What is the Government's position?

Dr. Reid: I hope that I can help to clarify things for the hon. Gentleman, who seems slightly confused over two issues. One is the remit of General de Chastelain, which of course runs until February; the other is the agreement made at Hillsborough last year, which expressed the two Governments' belief and expectation that we could make substantial progress towards implementing all aspects of the agreement by June this year—and that remains our goal. I think that those were, almost literally, the words of the Hillsborough agreement.

As for the premise on which the hon. Gentleman's question was based, it is true that we shall pay attention to the election results and the Assembly results, but it is also true that this process belongs not to the Westminster elections or the Assembly elections, but to the people of Northern Ireland, who agreed it and supported it in a referendum. That is an important point to make.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): We have had many months of relative peace in Northern Ireland, thanks largely to the fact that individuals who were formerly adversaries are now willing to work together in non-violent ways. Would not this be a good time for those who have been sceptical, or even hostile, towards the Good Friday agreement to recognise that they should now accept that people are walking around today in Northern Ireland who would not have been alive had the agreement not progressed? Would not this also be a good time for those people who have tried to obstruct the agreement to play their part in ensuring a lasting peace?

Dr. Reid: Yes. I do not underestimate the passions or the pain involved in the process for all sides of the community, including Members of Parliament. It is not easy to put aside 30 years and the number of deaths there have been. It is not easy either to put aside the enmity and hostility that has stretched back generations. However, I genuinely believe that the vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland and their politicians, including many Members of Parliament, have shown tremendous moral courage. I would encourage all Members to recognise, even at this late stage, that there is no alternative to the Good Friday agreement as a platform.

In so doing, and with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a sincere thank you on behalf of the House and the people of Northern Ireland to the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), who will leave us, at least in this forum. They have made a major contribution to the business of the House to the benefit of the people they represent, as well as all of the people of Northern Ireland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Once again, I ask the Chamber to be silent while hon. Members are addressing the House.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Does the Secretary of State accept that the Belfast agreement was rightly and inevitably a huge compromise on the part of those who took part and that it will take the peace process forward only if the undertakings given at Hillsborough are implemented in full?

Dr. Reid: I entirely accept that. There can be no movement forward unless all the parties to the agreement carry out their part in it. There is much talk of rights in Northern Ireland, and we have met those demands for rights with the equality and human rights legislation and with a raft of other legislation and policies aimed at defending the individual and sections of the community. Along with those rights go responsibilities, and it is the responsibility of all of us involved in the agreement to play our part in ensuring full implementation.

Mr. MacKay: So will the Secretary of State now accept that the only people who have failed to fulfil their obligations under the agreement are the paramilitaries, both so-called loyalists and republicans, who have failed to decommission one single gun or one ounce of Semtex? Is not it therefore inevitable that their political representatives cannot for much longer remain Ministers in the Executive? Will the Secretary of State join me in supporting the First Minister and the signing of his post-dated letter to Lord Alderdice as the right way forward?

Dr. Reid: As far as the First Minister is concerned, I have made my view plain. However, I cannot agree with the sentiments of the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), because his argument has a flawed logic. First, it is a peace process, not a peace event, and it is therefore natural, in both historical and practical terms, that there will be movement on different issues at different times.

Secondly, I have already said that all of us have responsibilities and not just rights, and it is neither useful nor sensible to point the finger at one group. Having said that, if the right hon. Gentleman's question was a coded message for the question, "Wouldn't it be helpful and useful to the Unionist community to have progress on decommissioning", the answer is yes. However, I also want to see progress on policing, with the two sides coming together, and on demilitarisation and normalisation. There are many better things that the British Army is needed for than patrolling alongside the police in south Armagh and I look forward to the day when that no longer happens. Yes, we want to see decommissioning, but not on its own because we want to see other things. We hope to achieve that goal by June, as the First Minister has made plain.

Barnett Formula

4. **Mr. David Trimble** (Upper Bann): What recent discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to the Barnett formula. [159618]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. George Howarth): I regularly discuss a range of issues with ministerial colleagues. This issue was among a number raised with me recently by the right hon. Gentleman's colleague, the Minister for Finance and Personnel, Mark Durkan. The Government have no plans to change the Barnett formula.

Mr. Trimble: With regard to—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I ask the House to come to order? The commotion is unfair to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Trimble: When the Minister next speaks to his ministerial colleague, who is noted more for the noise that he makes than the sense, will he point out that the Barnett formula is a purely mathematical formula that gives the regions the per capita increases that occur elsewhere? In England and Wales, average real-terms expenditure is expected to rise over the next three years by 6 per cent. in round figures. The equivalent figure in Scotland is 5 per cent.; in Wales it is 4 per cent. and in Northern Ireland 3 per cent. Will he point out that the formula does not operate very fairly?

Mr. Howarth: As the right hon. Gentleman has just made clear, per capita spending in addition to baseline spending is apportioned by applying the Barnett formula. For Northern Ireland, that delivers a lower percentage increase on the existing baseline because Northern Ireland starts from a higher per capita basis than any other region in the United Kingdom.

The Barnett formula and its operation are matters for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose officials are in regular contact with their counterparts in the devolved Administrations. At present, there are no plans to change Barnett, as I have already said, beyond updating it from time to time to take account of changes in the relative population in each part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does the Minister agree that the Barnett formula has indeed been good for Northern Ireland? Economic growth there is at 4 per cent., unemployment is at unprecedentedly low levels of below 6 per cent., and investment has risen by 75 per cent. over the past five years. Would not any tinkering with the Barnett formula need to be looked at very carefully? It is a sensitive issue. The formula has delivered in economic terms for Northern Ireland, and has served the peace process well.

Mr. Howarth: In response to my hon. Friend's second question, I should say that there are no plans at all of the sort that he mentioned. I agree entirely that the peace process is delivering in terms of equality and in terms of a proper basis for human rights in Northern Ireland. It is also delivering the highest levels of economic growth anywhere in the UK. The peace process is a success.

Paramilitary Prisoners

5. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What procedures he has put in place to monitor the activities of former paramilitary prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [159619]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): Arrangements are in place to ensure that the Northern Ireland Prison Service is advised if any former prisoner, including former paramilitary prisoners, who is subject to licence conditions comes to the attention of the police for adverse behaviour. It is then for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider whether such a prisoner has breached the terms of the licence, and to make a decision on recall to prison.

Mr. Connarty: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does not he think that people in other parts of the UK might have more confidence in the Good Friday agreement if events such as have occurred in my constituency were not possible? A cowardly UVF murderer who killed innocent Protestants and Catholics is now threatening the people in my constituency. Would not it be better if the licence contained the simple wording that appears in the equivalent licence for Scottish prisoners, which enjoins prisoners that they

> "shall be of good behaviour and shall keep the peace"?

Would not that give the police some leverage when it came to reporting misdemeanours?

Mr. Ingram: I am aware that a former life sentence prisoner who was given early release under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 has been presenting problems for the social work services in Falkirk, and therefore for the community as well. Arrangements are in place to ensure that the Northern Ireland Prison Service is told of any former prisoner who is subject to licence coming to the attention of the police, whether in Great Britain or in Northern Ireland. The police in my hon. Friend's constituency have not as yet drawn this case to the attention of the Prison Service. If my hon. Friend cares to write to me with further details of the case, I will give it active consideration.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [159645] **Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 9 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Mr. Hammond: We now know that the Prime Minister's contact with the Hinduja brothers was far greater than he has disclosed, including a stream of correspondence and at least two meetings. Can the Prime Minister explain why he did not tell Sir Anthony Hammond's inquiry that he attended a private dinner at the Hinduja brothers' London residence just six months before the Government granted a passport to G.P. Hinduja?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman has any complaints about my propriety or anyone else's, he should make them to the proper authorities in the proper way. However, I think that that question says a lot about today's Conservative party. Conservative Members do not want to talk about the economy, the health service, schools or jobs, and that is because, on the serious issues of the day, they have nothing whatever to say.

Q2. [159646] **Dr. Desmond Turner** (Brighton, Kemptown): Is my right hon. Friend aware that even in my south-coast city of Brighton and Hove there are still thousands of people in social exclusion, still suffering from the after effects of 18 years of Tory rule? *[Interruption.]* Will he ensure that the next Labour Government continue the war on poverty and social exclusion, wherever they are found—north or south—into the next Parliament?

The Prime Minister: From the reaction of Conservative Members, I think that they are suffering from 18 years of Conservative Government.

The measures that we have taken on social exclusion, including the new deal, which has helped to cut youth unemployment by more than a half, the working families tax credit, which has given hope to more than 1 million families, and the extra investment going into our schools system, help every citizen in need in our country. The choice is between this party, which would keep those measures and build on them, and the Conservative party, which would get rid of them.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Will the Prime Minister join me in wishing well Members of all parties who have announced that they are leaving the House, including two who came here more than 50 years ago—my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who will certainly be missed on both sides of the House, and the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who will mainly be missed on our side of the House?

On other matters, at the last election the Prime Minister said that he loved the pound. Will he renew this worthless vow in this election?

The Prime Minister: Let me join the right hon. Gentleman in what he said about the Father of the House and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield. Personally, I wish that they were both staying—for different reasons.

On the pound we have set out our position many times. In principle, we are in favour of joining a single currency. In practice, the economic conditions have to be met. The difference between the two political parties is that, should we recommend that we join the single currency, we will give the final say to the British people in a referendum. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can explain how he can be against the single currency in principle, but only for five years?

Mr. Hague: Two weeks before the last election, this article appeared:

> "Tony Blair last night declared for the first time that he loved the pound. He said, 'I know exactly what the British people feel when they see the Queen's head on a ten-pound note. I feel it too. There are emotional issues involved in the single currency . . . it's about the sovereignty of Britain.'"

Was not his emotional exploitation of the Queen's head before the last election just like his emotional exploitation of schoolchildren at this election? And why does he not come clean, be straight with people and admit that he wants to ditch the pound as soon as he can get away with it?

The Prime Minister: We said before the last election that the test would be what was right for British jobs, British industry and British investment, and that is indeed the test. Should we recommend to people that we join the single currency, of course the people will have the final say in a referendum. What we should not do as a country is isolate and marginalise ourselves in Europe, when 3 million jobs in this country depend on Europe.

As for schools, let me remind the right hon. Gentleman that it is this Government who have cut class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, and who have put a huge investment into our schools. Thousands of schools up and down the country have had money under the new deal for schools. Again, the difference is that we would keep that money and build on it and the right hon. Gentleman would cut that money.

Mr. Hague: Even the schoolgirls yesterday saw straight through the right hon. Gentleman. As we read in this morning's press:

> "One girl covered her head with her pullover as Mr. Blair rambled on about devolution. One wrinkled her nose and said, 'He's a big crook'"—

No wonder they made it a beacon school.

The right hon. Gentleman said in one of his famous memos:

> "On the euro we need to be . . . clearer. The truth is the politics is overwhelmingly in favour . . . and it would be far better to be open and upfront about this."

That was him, so let him now be open and upfront with the people of the country. Will he now come clean with the people of this country and say that he wants to ditch the pound at the earliest opportunity?

The Prime Minister: First of all, in respect of the euro, let me repeat to the right hon. Gentleman, in principle we are in favour. In practice the economic conditions have to be met, and the difference is between our commitment to determine that according to what is good for British jobs, British industry and British investment and the right hon. Gentleman's determination that people should not even have the choice of joining the single currency, even if it is right for jobs and investment. Again he refuses to explain why, if he is against the single currency in principle, he is only against it for five years—a fatuous policy.

As for the rest of what the right hon. Gentleman says, I think that that is an indication of how he intends fighting this campaign. Let me tell him how we intend fighting the campaign. First of all, we shall start with the economy, and let me spell out the difference between us. Under the Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a member there were 3 million unemployed and interest rates of 15 per cent., and national debt doubled; this party has the lowest inflation in Europe, mortgage rates half of those in the Tories' years and a million more people in work. Now if the right hon. Gentleman wants a proper debate and campaign, let him get up and ask a question on the economy.

Mr. Hague: The right hon. Gentleman briefed the newspapers yesterday that he wanted to take on the Tories over Europe, so come on, take on the Tories over Europe, instead of whining about it when we ask about Europe. In the last year I have asked the right hon. Gentleman 20 questions on health, and answers we have had zero; 23 on crime, answers zero; 38 on tax and the economy, answers zero. So now answer a question about Europe. The central deception before the last election was that the right hon. Gentleman claimed to love the pound and the moment it was over, he prepared for joining the euro. And is not the central deception at this election that he pretends to give people a choice while planning to bounce them into the euro? Does not that leave the only choice for people who want a straight and honest approach to Europe to support the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: In respect of the euro, it is important that we give the British people a choice. Should we recommend that we join the euro, they will have the final say in a referendum, and that is as it should be on a decision of that importance, but as we are debating Europe, let me remind the right hon. Gentleman that his policy is to oppose the treaty of Nice and, therefore, the enlargement of the European Union and to renegotiate Britain's essential terms of entry into the European Union. He has been unable, throughout the course of the last few years, to name one other country that supports those two positions, so perhaps if we have some quiet, we will now let Conservative Members shout out the name of one country that supports that position. There is none. He will therefore go into the election promising to renegotiate the essential terms of our entry into the European Union. That will put jobs at risk, investment at risk and industry at risk, so I am happy to debate Europe with him, but I think it remarkable that he is unable to debate the economy, schools, hospitals and crime.

Mr. Hague: Only one of today's party leaders has ever campaigned for withdrawal from the European Union, and it was not me and it was not the chap on his knees over there; it was the Prime Minister. His spin and broken promises on the euro are like his spin and broken promises on everything else; he said things could only get better, but secondary school class sizes are the highest for 25 years, hospital waiting lists are up, the asylum system is in chaos, the transport system is at a standstill, violent crime has soared and the rights and powers of our country are being given away. Why does he need a second chance to be all spin and no delivery?

The Prime Minister: Let us judge whether we have delivered on our promises by reference to a particular constituency—how about Richmond, Yorks for example? In Richmond, over 17,000 pensioners have benefited from the winter allowance of £200, and over 8,000 will benefit from the free TV licences. Since April 1997, long-term unemployment in Richmond is down 60 per cent. through the new deal. Waiting lists in the right hon. Gentleman's health authority are down 1,500, and there are 400 more nurses. At the present time as we speak, £600,000 is being spent on the Friarage hospital, Northallerton's accident and emergency department. The following schools have benefited from the new deal for schools: Applegarth primary, Brompton primary, Northallerton college, Richmond secondary school and Stokesley secondary school. In respect of class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, the number in his constituency over 30 is now zero. In addition, in the past year, crime has fallen by 6 per cent. In addition, over 11,000 families have benefited from child benefit increases. So we will let the country judge whether the negative rant on his side or the specifics on mine are more credible.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): As a retiring Labour Member, may I wish my right hon. Friend, and hon. Friends, every success in the coming election? May I say that the Government have successfully combined economic competence with social justice and compassion and thoroughly deserve a second term, which will be vital for the future of the country, especially in its relations with the European Union?

The Prime Minister: That is, of course, right because if the Conservative party were elected and pursued the policy of opposing the treaty of Nice, which would wreck the enlargement process, and of renegotiating Britain's essential terms of entry into the European Union, the effect, since no other country in the entire European Union would support it, would be to face this country with a choice of either humiliation or exit from Europe, and neither is a very palatable choice to face. That is why I say that the right hon. Gentleman may make his jokes at the Dispatch Box, but during the campaign, he will have to answer those points on Europe, and he has no answers to them.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): In yesterday afternoon's homily, the Prime Minister acknowledged that his Government had failed to deliver in certain specific key policy areas. Looking back over the course of this Parliament, what is the Prime Minister's greatest personal disappointment on policy?

The Prime Minister: It is obviously the case that in the first two years, as a result of the need to get the deficit down—the doubled national debt and the high borrowing we inherited from the Conservatives—tough spending decisions were taken. However, we now have a stable economy; we have mortgage rates that are about half what they were during the Tory years; there is low inflation and there are more jobs in the economy. Investment is going into every area of our public services. Of course, it will take time to see that investment through, but the essential difference between ourselves and the Conservatives is that we want that investment to go in while they would cut it and take it out.

Mr. Kennedy: The Prime Minister could have mentioned schools, where secondary class sizes have gone up. He could have mentioned hospitals, where out-patient waiting times have soared, or he could have mentioned crime, where there are fewer police. With hindsight, does he not regret sticking to the Tory spending plans during most of this Parliament? Did not he raise hopes so high for millions at the previous election that by this election millions are deeply disappointed in him?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not regret the tough first two years because they were necessary. We wanted to avoid the situation that we got into during the early 1990s—the same policies that the Conservatives have at present. We would have ended up in the same position—boom and bust, high interest rates, high levels of unemployment, and with many people in the country in difficulty. So those first two years were necessary.

In respect of the specifics, the right hon. Gentleman's comments are either wrong or incomplete. It is correct that out-patient numbers went up during the first two years; now they are falling. The in-patient waiting lists have fallen by more than 100,000, as we pledged. On secondary school class sizes, the number is 0.3 of a pupil—it was going up for years before we came into office. However, we said that the priority was to get class sizes down for five, six and seven-year-olds—that we have done.

Police numbers were falling for years under the Conservatives. Because of tough spending limits, I agree that those numbers carried on falling during the first three years. During the past year, however, they have risen by 1,400 and during the next three years, if the country backs the investment going in, we shall have the largest-ever number of police in this country.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): May I thank the Prime Minister for all his very hard work during the past four years and the Leader of the Opposition for the help that he has given during that time? May I also express the hope that on 7 June people realise that many thousands sacrificed their lives to give us the vote, and that if people do not use it they betray that inheritance? Finally, will he believe me when I say that this is not a coded request for a peerage? I do not believe that in the second Chamber—however reformed—it would be possible to pursue an interest in democratic politics.

The Prime Minister: I am not sure how to answer the last part of that question. I thank my right hon. Friend for his support in the coming election. Whatever disagreements we may have had in the Labour party, I think that most people in the country have a deep respect for his integrity and for his sense of devotion to the House.

Q3. [159647] **Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): This is my last ever Prime Minister's question; indeed, it is the first time that my name has appeared in this part of the Order Paper since February 1997—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Is the Prime Minister content with the state of higher education under his Government? Is he happy that even though research funds secured are now the only yardstick for judging university staff, the starting salary of a researcher in a London university is £4,000 less than the starting salary of an assistant lift attendant on the London underground? Is that really his commitment to "Education, education, education"?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the fact that we need more resources in further and higher education which is, of course, why we are putting that money in. However, our priority during the first few years was to get the money into nurseries and primary schools. In the second term, if we are elected, we also want to get money into secondary schools and universities. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman that, whereas under the previous Conservative Government the funding of science fell very, very sharply, under the Labour Government we shall be making a larger investment in science than this country has seen since the 1960s. Of course, it is only because we have been able to reform the system of student finance that we are able to get the money that does go into further and higher education actually into the front line of university provision.

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): After four years of steady progress in creating jobs in my constituency, does my right hon. Friend recognise the devastating impact of the closure of the Plaxton bus factory in my constituency, which is detailed in early-day motion 645? Will he endorse the progress made in the few days since last Thursday by our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in setting up a rapid reaction force to work for the people of Scarborough and North Yorkshire? Will the Prime Minister assure the House that he will do his best to make sure that bus building in Scarborough survives?

The Prime Minister: I certainly give my hon. Friend that assurance. I am aware of how important that industry is to his constituency and I welcome the progress made at recent meetings between my hon. Friend, the trade unions, the management, the Minister for Competitiveness, and other interested parties. Looking at all the options for sustaining a viable work force is the right way forward and we remain hopeful that, with the right spirit of partnership, which has certainly been present there up to now, we shall be able to find a way forward for my hon. Friend's constituents and the industry.

Q4. [159648] **Sir Archie Hamilton** (Epsom and Ewell): The Prime Minister knows that I always give him credit where it is due. I should like to congratulate him on a speech on welfare spending that he made in 1997, in which he said that the rate of spending on welfare in this country was unsustainable, the country could no longer afford it, and the money was going to all the wrong people. Why then, since he has been in power, has the welfare budget gone up by £20 billion, why is it consuming the same percentage of national resources as it was in 1997, and why by 2004 will the percentage of families receiving means-tested benefits have risen from 24 per cent. in 1999 to 40 per cent.?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman reminds me that I said that the money should go to the right people. That is precisely what is happening—it is going to right people. The money to which he refers includes pensions, the £200 winter fuel allowance, free television licences and extra pension money, as well as the working families tax credit, which is also important.

What I actually said in 1997 was that we had to distinguish between the bills of economic and social failure under the Conservatives and the social security spending that we wanted to be increased, such as pensions and help for low-income families. That is what we have done. Measures such as the new deal combined with the strength of the economy have resulted in the bills of economic and social failure falling and in our having £5 billion extra to put into schools, hospitals, police and transport. I thank the right hon. Gentleman for reminding of what I said in 1997; I am pleased to say that we have done it.

Q5. [159649] **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the minimum wage, which was introduced by this radical Government in the teeth of opposition from the Tories and without even one Scottish National party Member of Parliament bothering to turn up to vote for it, is being undermined to a terrible extent in the catering and hospitality industry? When he forms his next radical Government in a few weeks, will he consider introducing legislation to stop rip-off bosses paying catering workers £2 an hour, then topping up wages to the minimum wage using credit card payments and tips given into restaurant kitties?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the problem. As my hon. Friend will know, the Low Pay Commission made some statements on it recently. The minimum wage has meant that hundreds of thousands of families have been able to get a decent income for the first time in their lives. It must be seen alongside the working families tax credit, because the combination of those two measures has resulted in many low-income families having a minimum income for the first time, and many people being willing to go out and get jobs because they are paid more to work than they used to be paid on benefits.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Does the Prime Minister recall that in 1998, when the people voted for the Belfast agreement, they rightly anticipated the decommissioning of illegal firearms in Northern Ireland? I should like to place on record my appreciation of the work done by the Prime Minister and his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), on Northern Ireland issues: they have helped us greatly.

However, does the Prime Minister recall that one year ago, in May, the IRA said that it would put its arms beyond use by June 2001? Does he agree that that appears not to be happening? Does he understand that the decommissioning of illegal firearms is tremendously important to the people of Northern Ireland if peace and democracy are to be sustained? I was glad to hear the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) say so earlier this afternoon. Will the right hon. Gentleman assure us that, if he remains Prime Minister after the election, he will ensure that it continues to be an obligation that the IRA decommissions its illegal arms in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: First, may I reciprocate by saying how much I value the work that the right hon. Gentleman has put into the peace process in Northern Ireland in the past few years? He has made an enormous contribution, and I thank him for that. In respect of decommissioning paramilitary weapons, of course that should happen. We are aware of the obligations under the Good Friday agreement, which must be honoured in full. I very much hope that we will be able to make progress on that and other outstanding issues, which we will do as quickly as possible if we are re-elected to form the Government of this country. The right hon. Gentleman will agree that, whatever the difficulties of the process, there is no doubt at all that for the people of Northern Ireland it offers the only sensible and secure way forward. That is why, whatever the problems, we shall certainly do everything that we can to ensure that the obligations of all parties under the agreement are fully honoured.

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): This is my last contribution to the House because I, too, am retiring. I thank my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government for all they have done for the mining communities in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, especially with regard to emphysema, bronchitis, white finger and the money that has been given to the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to help those communities. However, one bit of business is not finished—my right hon. Friend is smiling because he knows what I am going to say. What are we going to do for the men who were sacked during the miners strike? Can we start by buying them back into the miners pension fund?

To hon. Members on both sides of the House, and everyone who has been a friend, I say thank you—it is nice knowing you.

The Prime Minister: In respect of the sacked miners, my hon. Friend knows of the discussions on that. It is a difficult issue, for reasons with which he is well familiar and that I have outlined to him personally. On the mining communities as a whole, I am glad he recognises the substantial investment that has been made in them. We have not merely tried to save the existing mines, but have ensured that those people who suffered—and there is considerable physical suffering as result of working down the mines—are properly compensated. I know that that has also taken time, because each case has to be individually considered, but the commitment is there. As a result of the work done by the Deputy Prime Minister, an enormous amount of investment has gone into the coalfield communities to help them get back on their feet and have a decent standard of living for their people when the mining industry has finished in their area.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): If the Prime Minister has influence over the agenda of the next Government, will he build on the achievements of this Parliament in reforming the two Houses of our legislature? Will he advance the process of democratisation and give the people of Britain an opportunity to vote for a fairer electoral system for the two Houses of Parliament?

The Prime Minister: On the latter question, I have nothing to add to what I said before in the House. On the former, I would not agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Gentleman's agenda for reform of the House of Lords. It is important that we initiate a reform that makes it more representative, but which does not end up in gridlock or competition between the two Houses of Parliament. That we will endeavour to do.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend share the dismay of charities, churches and aid organisations that are appalled at the Opposition's decision to oppose the International Development Bill, which is one of the finest pieces of legislation? Does he agree that if, at this eleventh hour, they do not change their mind, his new Government will make the commitment to the poorest people in the poorest countries a major aspect of his agenda?

The Prime Minister: I hope very much that the Opposition would support the International Development Bill. It is an important Bill that indicates what I have to say is a clear and sharp division of values between the two sides of the House. One of the proudest achievements of this Government over the past few years has been writing off large amounts of debt and increasing aid and development as a proportion of our national income. It is a tragedy that the Opposition remain opposed to those policies, which I believe are supported by the vast majority of people in the country.

Q6. [159650] **Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): This is the last question to the Prime Minister, so he can relax now.

The Prime Minister spoke to children in a school in Southwark yesterday, so will he reflect on the fact that every child there receives support from the Government to the tune of £42,700? Will he also reflect on the fact that, had he chosen to hold that meeting in Stockport, every child there receives only £27,400? Does he believe that his boast of "Education, education, education," has been fulfilled when there are such gross inequities in the funding of schoolchildren in different parts of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: There are issues in respect of the funding of local authorities, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is the subject of a local government finance Green Paper that will be succeeded by a White Paper in October. However—whether in Stockport or any other part of the country—as a result of what the Government have done, there are huge amounts of additional investment going into education. There is the largest amount of money going into education over the next few years that this country has seen for a very long time, if not ever. I have to say to the hon. Gentleman, who is a Liberal Democrat, that we are putting in far more investment than his party ever sought at the previous general election. It is all part of the investment that is going into our schools, our hospitals, our transport and our police and we are doing that on the basis of a strong and stable economy. It is the combination of a stable economy and investment in public services that I believe will recommend itself to this country.

Personal Statement

3.32 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I was absolutely delighted, as I am sure was the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), by the glowing tribute that the Prime Minister paid to us at the beginning of his remarks. It was inspired, no doubt, by the first half of the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—the second half was not quite in the same vein. I should like to thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to make this personal statement as my final contribution to the proceedings in this Parliament. The fact that it is a final contribution explains why I am using a script for the first time since I ceased to be Prime Minister.

As a retiring Member, I am grateful to the electors of Bexley for returning me as their representative in 14 successive general elections. It has been an honour and a privilege as well as a pleasure to serve them. I should also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staff of the House. These often forgotten people—Clerks, security staff, librarians, catering staff and others—ensure that this place runs so efficiently. As Father of the House, I feel a certain responsibility to ensure that we appreciate what they do and pay tribute to them.

You, Mr. Speaker, are also deserving of my thanks. In allowing the right hon. Member for Chesterfield and myself the freedom of the House, you have kindly allowed us to continue to use some of the facilities of this establishment.

It is more than 51 years since I became a Member of the House and I remember full well the impact that it made on me in those early days. In fact, I had been a Member only a few months when I was invited to become a Whip and a member of the Conservative Opposition. As a result, I spent my first 25 years here on the Front Bench, either in government or in opposition. After that, I spent the next 25 years—on the Front Bench—[*Laughter*]—below the Gangway. During that time, I learned a great deal, particularly when I was first a Whip—in fact, that was the reason why I became a Whip.

In those days, the Whips had a place at the Door and, if they wanted to, they kept Members in or let us pass. When our Whip asked one of our Members, "Have you got a pair?", he said, "No" and went on. The Whip said, "Well, you can't go out. Get a pair." "No, I haven't got a pair," replied the Member. Whereupon our enthusiastic Whip jumped up, gave him a hefty kick in one of the usual places, and the man fell flat on the floor. He had to be picked up and set on his feet; he went to the Chief Whip and complained. As a result, the Whip himself was changed; I was sent for and invited to take his place. The result was a notice in *The Times* the next day, to this effect:

> "Colonel Walter Bromley Davenport, MP for Knutsford, majority 16,913. He has resigned in order to give greater attention to his constituents. His place is now being taken by Mr. Edward Heath, MP for Bexley, majority 133."

That is how I began my climb to fame. The next day, I was taken to see Churchill, who patted me on the shoulder and said, "Yes, of course you can be a Whip." I quote his words:

> "It will mean much hard work and it will be unremunerated but so long as I am your leader it will never remain unthanked."

That was a guiding principle all the time. After that, I had all the work of a Whip, involving many different activities and different parts of the world. It also entailed the relationship between Parliament and the Executive—the Government themselves.

When I look back over my 51 years here, I cannot help but be saddened by the increasing impotence of the House and the decline in the esteem in which this place is held; I am speaking quite frankly. The powers of Parliament to hold the Executive to account have been declining for over a century under Governments of all political persuasions. I can only hope that the Parliament following this one will reassess and reassert its authority, and robustly hold the Executive to account.

I should like to say a word about standards in public life. The behaviour of us Members has also undermined public confidence in parliamentary democracy. As I noted during a debate when I entered the House in 1950, every Member of Parliament was seen as a person of integrity. Unfortunately, some reckless campaigning and an increasingly cynical media excessively focusing on a few examples of unparliamentary behaviour have led to a serious and worrying decline in the public perception of Members of Parliament. I hope that the new intake and existing Members will take note of the need to set an example in those spheres. I also hope that when the conduct of one or two Members falls below the required standards, the media will not try and tar all Members with the same brush.

Perhaps I may finally say a word about Europe. [*Interruption.*] Do I hear a rumbling? As the subject has already been extensively dealt with this afternoon by my leader, I have no doubts about continuing with it. It is most appropriate that I make the final points of my statement and my final remarks in the House about Europe. I have been a committed European since my Oxford days. My pro-European outlook was reinforced by my wartime experiences. In 1945, as both the victors and the vanquished surveyed the devastation wrought upon the continent, it became obvious that Europe could not afford another war.

Unfortunately, the case for British membership of the European Community was not recognised by British Governments of the 1950s, so this country lost the opportunity to be a founder member of the Community. However, its architects, Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, correctly recognised that the European Community would not be complete without the United Kingdom.

My proudest achievement was to have successfully negotiated entry of the United Kingdom into the European Community. In January 1972, she fulfilled her destiny. The United Kingdom has always been a European country. We have a shared history and culture. In the modern world it is only right that we should share our sovereignty with our European neighbours, for the greater benefit of all.

In due course, for the second time in a quarter of a century, the British people will be asked to vote on whether the country can remain a committed player in Europe. I look forward to campaigning vigorously for a yes vote. I have no doubt whatever that a united Europe is here to stay. I believe that it is in British interests, and I believe that we should do everything that we can to help it and to help its people. We shall then be helping ourselves as a people and as a country, and we shall be supporting our own continent. That will be for the good not only of Europe as a whole, but of the world. For those who will follow us in the House, I wish them all well.

Business Statement

3.43 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business for tomorrow will be: consideration of Lords amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill. Then, if amendments are received from the other place, the House will also consider Lords amendments to the Criminal Justice and Police Bill. That will be followed by the remaining stages of the International Criminal Court Bill *[Lords]*. The House may also be asked to consider any other Lords amendments that may be received.

On Friday, if amendments are received from the other place, the business will be, consideration of Lords amendments to the Children's Commissioner for Wales Bill, then the Armed Forces Bill and the Social Security Contributions (Share Options) Bill. The House may also be asked to consider any Lords messages that may be received.

The House will not adjourn until Royal Assent has been received to all Acts. Parliament will be dissolved on Monday 14 May by proclamation.

In addition to the business in Westminster Hall, I remind the House that the Regional Affairs Committee will meet at 1.30 pm tomorrow.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement. Can she confirm that Treasury questions will be taken tomorrow?

I welcome the fact that later today there will be time to debate the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill, a measure that has cross-party support and which is of particular help to people in rural areas, especially those who have suffered from the foot and mouth crisis.

It has been interesting to note which Bills have not been given high enough priority to progress to their final conclusion—reference was made to that during Prime Minister's Question Time. They include the homelessness legislation, the International Development Bill, which has yet to receive any scrutiny in the other place, and the Adoption and Children Bill, which for reasons we all understand is still at the Committee stage as it is complex and requires careful scrutiny. It is important that I put it on the record that, on coming to office, the Conservative party will almost certainly reintroduce the Adoption and Children Bill as a priority for a Conservative Government. Having had a Queen's Speech for this Session as late as December last year, it is regrettable that priority has been given to legislation on foxes rather than that on international development and the homeless.

The Leader of the House announced that in tomorrow's business we shall deal with the Health and Social Care Bill, which will abolish community health councils. CHCs contain people who have served their community well, and have been the champions of patients, holding health authorities and the medical profession to account. At this late stage, I plead with the Government to consider the valuable work that those people have done, and to drop that part of the Bill.

Mrs. Beckett: I confirm that there will be Treasury questions tomorrow, and that we anticipate that we shall

[Mrs. Beckett]

get through the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill. As the hon. Lady rightly said, the Adoption and Children Bill is under discussion in Committee. It deals with a complex and important subject, and the whole House wants it to be dealt with thoroughly.

It is obviously a source of regret that other legislation may not proceed. I am surprised by the hon. Lady's remarks about the International Development Bill, as there was nothing to prevent the Conservative party from allowing it to reach the statute book if it chose to do so.

The issues raised by the Health and Social Care Bill will be discussed, but as I am sure the hon. Lady is aware, the Government believe that we need to put in place stronger arrangements for the representation of patients, which is what the Bill envisages.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): Does the Leader of the House share my regret that this is the first Session of Parliament since the 1973–74 Session when no private Members' Bills have succeeded? On her return, will she ensure, while protecting Government business, that private Members' Bills are also protected, especially from individual vandalism and the wrecking techniques of Conservative Members?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important point. A feature of this Parliament—not just of this Session—is that it has been much more difficult than usual to get private Members' Bills on to the statute book, even those that were widely thought to be non-controversial and that were welcomed by all parties. I accept that that is a matter for concern. My hon. Friend will know that the issue is much discussed.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that, should she still be chairing the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons, she will look favourably on the suggestion that the way in which we deal with private Members' legislation should be examined as a matter of urgency? I think that all Back Benchers would concur with that.

Does the right hon. Lady share my concern and astonishment that the Conservatives seem to want to blackball the International Development Bill, although it has been subject to much inquiry? Will she please do everything in her power to make them see reason? Does she accept that there is an element of stage-managed brinkmanship at the end of a Parliament, but this time it is extraordinary, given that we have all known for many weeks that this moment was coming?

Does she also accept that it is extraordinary that the Government are anxious to steamroller legislation through the House in this Parliament when presumably they are confident of re-election? On the other side, the Conservatives are desperate to extract the last ounce of compromise when presumably they believe that one day they will be elected to government again. The way in which we have to deal with these matters at the fag-end of a Parliament is extraordinary.

Mrs. Beckett: Few parliamentary ends were more evidence of that than the end of the last Parliament. Although it ran until the last possible date, at the close of the Session it was necessary for the Government to deal with some 16 pieces of legislation—substantially more than we shall need to deal with this time.

It is, I fear, a feature of our system that it is always necessary to deal with things in this way. I reject the suggestion that we are attempting to steamroller legislation through—we are allowing time for proper consideration—although I share the hon. Gentleman's regret about the stonewalling of the International Development Bill, which I find wholly inexplicable.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): As my right hon. Friend will know, one of the private Members' Bills that have, sadly, been lost is my Christmas Day Trading Bill, which would have protected the interests of low-paid workers and secured their right to remain with their families on one of the most important days in the Christian calendar. May I commend the subject of the Bill to my right hon. Friend, and hope that Her Majesty's Government will look kindly on an important but quite straightforward measure which could be passed fairly quickly by an incoming Government and which would, I am sure, be welcomed by low-paid workers throughout the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend knows that I am not in a position to give advance commitments, but I understand the importance of the issue that she has raised and, as always, take her remarks seriously.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): Will the right hon. Lady give me the last assurance that I shall ask of any Minister? Will she assure me that, whatever position she holds in the next Parliament, she will use her experience in the Modernisation Committee—especially in the context of its last report—to try to enable Members on both sides of the House to realise the concept of ensuring that all legislation is fully debated and all Opposition amendments properly considered? That was the intention of the Committee's report; it has not worked, but it requires the co-operation of both sides. Perhaps, in the next Parliament, I shall be able to look from afar and see that it really is working.

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case, which I know he has pursued assiduously for many years. I have no hesitation in giving him, unequivocally, the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): As my right hon. Friend knows, over the past couple of months I have pressed regularly for a debate on matters of standards and privileges. Can she assure us that there will be a debate early in the next Parliament, before any assessment of the case being made by the office of standards for an increase in its resources? May we have a debate first, and then consideration of resources?

Mrs. Beckett: First, may I say that we shall certainly miss my hon. Friend on the Labour Benches?

My hon. Friend says, correctly, that he has pressed me on this matter a number of times. He makes an important point, and I have taken his words on board; but I suspect that, although he will not be here to deal with the issues that he has raised, others will take them up.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): As I made clear earlier today, the Prime Minister has maintained a stream of correspondence, and has held several meetings, with the Hindujas, which he did not disclose to Sir Anthony Hammond's inquiry. Parliament is the proper place in which to raise these issues. We now need a statement from the Prime Minister to clarify his position on two important points. First, why did the right hon. Gentleman ignore official advice, deepen his personal relations with the Hindujas and extend his Government's business with them, when he knew from January 1998 onwards that they were under investigation by the Indian Government? Secondly, why did he conceal his contacts and his meetings from Sir Anthony Hammond's inquiry?

Mrs. Beckett: None of that will arise in the business that we shall take during the next couple of days, and I think it a sad indication of the Conservative party's desperation that it seeks to raise those issues now.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On the points made by the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), the former Chairman of the Procedure Committee, does my right hon. Friend accept that, if programme motions are here to stay, whoever forms the next Government, and I cannot see any change, it is important to try to reach agreement—it may not be possible—with the Opposition, so that we do not sit all through the night, which is not necessary and which the public do not appreciate, and that the Opposition have the opportunity to put their points of view, which is the essence of our place of work and of parliamentary democracy? A compromise is possible if both sides wish it.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Indeed, there is growing evidence that people have begun to understand the opportunity and advantage that scheduling debate in that way can offer the Opposition. Let us hope that they will have many more years to make use of it.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): The right hon. Lady may be aware that, last weekend, we had the first serious outbreak of foot and mouth in west Somerset and that some 5,000 animals were culled, which is the clearest possible reminder that the suggestion that the outbreak is under control and over could not be more inaccurate. In that connection, a very serious crisis is emerging not only for agriculture but for tourism in the area. May I plead with the right hon. Lady again to speak to her colleagues in government and to do the one thing that might help: to introduce interest-free loans for some businesses, which otherwise will simply collapse? It will cost the Government much more, if they are serious about tourism, to try to re-create them. May we have a statement from the chairman of the taskforce before Parliament is dissolved?

Mrs. Beckett: All I can say to the right hon. Gentleman, who I know is also leaving this place, is that it is inaccurate to suggest that anyone has said that the foot and mouth outbreak is over. What has clearly been taken on board is the fact that, mercifully, the number of cases is falling, but everyone is very conscious of the fact that it is by no means over. Indeed, both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have said repeatedly that we must expect some fluctuation in the position and perhaps even some increase on occasion in the number of cases.

The right hon. Gentleman makes the point about the assistance and support that should be made available. I cannot promise that there will be a statement in the next few days, but I shall draw his remarks to the attention of the Minister.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Some 43 days ago, I asked two questions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which have still to receive a substantive answer. As questions are meant to be answered within a few working days, will the right hon. Lady confirm that all proper questions that are in order will be answered before the House rises?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot confirm that off the cuff, but I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of the relevant Department.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Walter Bagehot drew a distinction between the dignified and the efficient parts of the constitution. We have heard this week about the dignified parts: prorogation, the audience with the Queen and such like. What answer does the right hon. Lady have to the heartfelt plea by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) about the decline in the ability of this place to scrutinise the Executive? Is she aware that we are in danger of becoming a dignified part of the constitution? The only effective part will be the audience that the Prime Minister has with the head of the fourth estate, the editor of *The Sun*.

Mrs. Beckett: I point out to the hon. Gentleman, who I am sure was listening to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), that the right hon. Gentleman claimed that that trend had taken place over the past century, not over the past four years. Some of the changes that the Government have made have improved opportunities for scrutiny, not least the opportunity to scrutinise business from the European Union. There were substantial gaps in the ability of the House to cover that legislation, which have been remedied by the Government. Further opportunities have been provided in Westminster Hall, the establishment of which was opposed by many Conservatives Members. Other reforms are under way, including the reforms long advocated by the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), the former Chairman of the Procedure Committee. We believe that those reforms will facilitate improved scrutiny, should hon. Members use them to their full effect.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I echo and reinforce the call by the shadow Leader of the House for the Government to take the ready opportunity and the chance to save face, and not to scrap community health councils. The excellent CHCs of Cheshire Central, and Chester and Ellesmere Port need not be scrapped. There is a continuing sense of outrage about the scrapping of those excellent representative bodies. The Government have a chance to do the right thing. I urge the Leader of the House to encourage her colleagues to take that chance now.

Mrs. Beckett: Those matters have been extensively discussed in our consideration of the Bill, and no doubt they will be again.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Is the right hon. Lady aware that I tabled to the Agriculture Minister a

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

named-day question on whether he would make a statement on the price of inspection for small and medium-sized abattoirs? The question was due to be answered today, so why have I only been told today that it has been transferred to the Secretary of State for Health. Why has the question not been answered today?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot tell the hon. Lady that, but I can certainly undertake to draw her concerns to the attention of my relevant colleagues.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): It might be helpful for the right hon. Lady to know that MAFF has told me in an answer that it has not been able to answer within the allotted time 98 per cent. of the questions that it has been asked in the past month. My question, however, is whether she will answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House about whether there will be Treasury questions tomorrow.

Mrs. Beckett: I did answer that, and there will be.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Can the Leader of the House explain why No. 10 Downing street was yesterday able to issue a press release announcing that Dissolution will be on Monday, whereas she was clearly unable to answer that question when she was asked it in the Chamber? Why was it possible for that information to be made clear to the press before hon. Members were allowed to have it?

Mrs. Beckett: The press were informed first, but negotiations were continuing when I made my statement yesterday. That is why I was not able to give the House all the information that I gave it today.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): As it would appear from what the Leader has told us that most of the business in the next two days relates to amendments coming here from another place, and since presumably even the Leader cannot predict with great accuracy how many amendments there may be, may we have an undertaking from her that the Government will make no attempt to reduce, truncate or otherwise limit the time that we have properly to consider amendments from the other place and any other business that may be before us? I think that it would be very helpful, even at this stage of the Parliament, if we were given that reassurance and if the Government were prepared for once properly to be scrutinised and held to account in this place.

Mrs. Beckett: I can certainly assure the right hon. Gentleman that we shall follow the precedents that have been followed by every Government at the rise of every Parliament.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does the right hon. Lady recognise that the prospect of a number of items of business on Friday will give me an additional glint in my eye and spring in my step as it presumably means, does it not, that Friday's business will close with an Adjournment debate on treatment of diabetes sufferers, which it will be my privilege to introduce?

Mrs. Beckett: I must freely confess that I had not been studying that. However, the hon. Gentleman may well be correct.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the right hon. Lady ensure that, before Dissolution, we have an opportunity to discuss the two impending tube strikes in London and the other rail strikes across the country that have been called by the RMT union? Such a debate would give us an opportunity to discuss the extraordinary fact that not only the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, but his deputy, the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) are members of that union. Of course the Secretary of State also receives substantial benefits in kind from that union.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not see any need for a further opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to make a point that he has already made on a number of occasions.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): The reply that the Leader of the House gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) shows that the Government still underestimate the desperate problems caused by foot and mouth to the rural economy. I have been on to the Agriculture Minister's private office for almost a week trying to sort out certain problems with licences, and we need his presence in this Chamber in the next two days to answer questions. We also need the presence of the Minister responsible for the taskforce. Although the Government have made some glossy PR announcements about the sums that are being handed down, people in the tourism industry cannot get hold of that money. They do not know who is distributing it or the criteria for applying for it. Members representing rural areas have only two more days to put those questions to the responsible Ministers. Can she please make a clear statement on why those two Ministers cannot find time in the next two days to come to the House to answer decent questions?

Mrs. Beckett: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that everyone in the Government takes the crisis in the rural economy extremely seriously. Additionally, as he will have observed, substantial sums have been made available, whether it is to agriculture or to tourism, and that will continue. I shall certainly draw the concerns expressed by hon. Members to the attention of my right. hon. and hon. Friends.

As the hon. Gentleman will, I believe, be the last contributor, may I take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to thank you, and your predecessor, for the way in which you have presided over this mêlée? Indeed, I thank all those who have participated, not least the shadow Leader of the House and her predecessors. As Leader of the House, let me say—on behalf of the whole House, if I may—how deeply indebted we are to all those who facilitate our proceedings: the officers and officials of the House in every capacity.

BILL PRESENTED

HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (REGISTRATION SCHEME) BILL

Mr. Alan Simpson presented a Bill to provide for a scheme for the registration and licensing of houses in multiple occupation; to require certain matters relating to energy efficiency to be included in such a scheme; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May, and to be printed [Bill 97].

Age Discrimination

4.5 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision in respect of age discrimination.

You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that in the previous Parliament I also introduced a Bill to outlaw age discrimination. Shortly thereafter I rather hoped that I would not have to raise the matter in the House again, because before the last election the Labour party committed itself to legislate against age discrimination. Unfortunately, Labour went on to win the election, and I assumed in good faith that, as the party had made that commitment, that would form part of its legislative programme. I went on hoping, rather against hope, that there would be some way of pricking the Labour Government's conscience and persuading them to implement their pre-electoral promises.

I was rather heartened on 2 December 1998, when I asked the Prime Minister whether he still stood by his commitment to legislate against age discrimination, and he answered:

> "Yes, we stand by it."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1998; Vol. 321, c. 879.]

I continued to wait in expectation, but, I have to say, with decreasing confidence that my expectations and those of millions of people affected by age discrimination would be met. Two weeks ago, as you will recall, Mr. Speaker, I again asked the Prime Minister at Question Time about his intentions in that regard, but all I got was the standard new Labour waffle.

It is clear that the Labour Government have no intention whatever of dealing with the matter, and that their promise before the last election has proved to be yet another broken promise. Many Members—and not only Members, but people throughout the country—will be saying, "So what's new? Labour have broken all their other major promises—about tuition fees, tax, class sizes, and a referendum on electoral reform." I would not want electoral reform, but having a referendum was a clear manifesto promise. People will ask, "Why shouldn't they break their promise on age discrimination, too?" In the light of events, that is the only reasonable attitude to take, but it is sad that we have to come to such cynical conclusions about how democracy is conducted in this country, and how the electorate is treated by the new Labour publicity and spin machine. I trust that on 7 June a suitable punishment is in store for those who have treated the British electorate in that fashion.

I, for one, will not forget about this issue—not in this Parliament, and not for as long as it takes—because it is extremely important. There are two aspects, both to the issue and to my Bill, and I shall deal with each in turn in the short time available.

The Bill deals with age discrimination both in the job market and in the provision of public services. In the employment market, the issue is one of justice. That is where I start from: it is a matter of elementary justice. We must all have encountered people in our surgeries who say that they are looking for a job and have sent their CVs round to hundreds of employees, but although they appear to be perfectly well qualified, they keep being told,

[Mr. Quentin Davies]

"I'm sorry, you're too old." Sometimes those people are in their 50s; sometimes they are even in their 40s—yet they are still being told that they are too old.

This is, first and foremost, a matter of elementary justice—the same issue as arises with race and sex discrimination. Human beings are not being considered on their merits as individuals, but are arbitrarily put into some Procrustean category, and condemned without their case having been considered at all. That is exactly the same issue as we encountered in race and sex discrimination before the House—rightly, in my view, but before I became a Member—legislated against those barbarities.

Age discrimination is an issue of justice and humanity. We want to avoid people being made to feel that simply because they are older, which they can do nothing about, they will not be given a fair chance or, worse, they will face a series of humiliations as they pursue the elementary human right to seek work and a role in society and the community.

The economic aspect of age discrimination will become increasingly important as the years go by. We all know that we face a rise in the dependency ratio, which is the number of people aged over 65—the notional standard retirement age—as a proportion of those aged between 20 and 65. The other member states of the European Union also face that problem, some of them to an even worse degree. The problem is worrying, because the number of people who are purely consumers as a proportion of those who are both producers and consumers will increase. That is problematic for the provision of public services and future consumption levels if people wish to increase their standard of living—as most hope to do when they are working and when they retire.

Any pension system is a claim on the resources of the economy and if the output of the economy declines or does not match the expectations that people had when they took out their pension—whether their pension is provided via taxation, through savings or the accumulation of a portfolio of financial securities—their standard of living will decline and their range of choices in retirement will not be what they hoped.

What can we do about the dependency ratio? We cannot, in a free society, alter the fertility rate through deliberate policies, and even if we could it would take, by definition, a generation or two before the position improved. One answer, which the United States has implemented to some extent, is immigration. Some 750,000 legal immigrants enter the US every year and, including illegal immigrants, the immigration figure is probably more than 1 million. There is a lesser degree of immigration into this country and the rest of the EU, and it is also associated with various social problems and tensions that may be more difficult to handle in a country such as this, which is physically overcrowded. However, immigration will have a role to play in the future if we are to address the issue of the dependency ratio and ensure that we continue to have a work force who enable the economy to expand. If the supply of labour is limited, economic growth cannot be pursued indefinitely. Capital can substitute for labour to a large extent, but labour is still essential for an economy, especially in labour-intensive service sectors.

Against that background, it is crazy to discard a resource that already exists—members of our community who are already here, already trained and already have experience. Some of those people want to work and have been told that they cannot. When they send in their CVs or ring up in answer to an advertisement, they are told, "Sorry, but we are not taking anybody over 40." Individual employers may feel that they can get away with that, because they can employ reasonable people below that age, but if the generality of the economy works on that basis, it will lose a precious resource.

The second issue addressed in the Bill is discrimination in the provision of public services, especially the national health service. I have spoken about the issue before in health debates. Many Opposition Members have spoken about that. There is much anecdotal evidence that, in practice, many procedures, drugs and operations are being denied to patients in our health service because of their age. I now have documentary evidence of that disgraceful practice. In a letter to me dated 17 April, Mr. Richard Jeavons, the chief executive of Lincolnshire health authority, stated that multiple sclerosis sufferers aged over 50 will not qualify for receiving beta interferon on the national health service. That is absolutely disgraceful.

The letter makes it clear that it is a fact, not a matter of anecdotal rumour, that age discrimination is being exercised in the NHS. I cannot believe that it is being exercised only against people in Lincolnshire, or only in the matter of beta interferon treatment for people with MS. The practice goes against every principle on which we like to think our society is based. My Bill is therefore more urgently needed than ever, and I trust that the House will give it a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Quentin Davies, Mr. Tony Baldry, Mr. Christopher Fraser, Mr. Michael Jack, Mr. Robert Jackson, Mr. Robert Key, Mrs. Eleanor Laing, Mrs. Jacqui Lait, Sir David Madel, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Mr. Richard Shepherd and Mr. Ian Taylor.

AGE DISCRIMINATION

Mr. Quentin Davies accordingly presented a Bill to make provision in respect of age discrimination: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May, and to be printed [Bill 98].

Business of the House

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

(1) At the sitting on Friday 11th May, notwithstanding the provisions of the Order [23rd January] relating to Business of the House, Government business shall have precedence;

(2) At the sittings on Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, Government business may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour;

(3) At this day's sitting, Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, Standing Order No. 38 shall apply and the Order [7th November 2000] relating to Deferred divisions shall not apply if, after the time for the interruption of business, the opinion of the Speaker as to the decision on a question is challenged in respect of any question;

(4) At this day's sitting, the requirements of paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) shall be dispensed with in respect of the Motion relating to Estimates 2001–02;

(5) At this day's sitting, any Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill ordered to be brought in and read the first time shall be proceeded with as if its Second Reading stood as an Order of the day, and Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills) shall apply;

(6) At this day's sitting, Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any messages from the Lords shall have been received;

(7) At the sitting on Friday 11th May, the House shall not adjourn until the Speaker shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses; and

(8) At its rising on Friday 11th May, the House shall adjourn to Tuesday 15th May.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

4.17 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am surprised that no Minister has sought to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, to explain this complicated and controversial motion. As has so often been the case, the House must now flounder around and guess the Government's intentions. We have had no guidance from the Government. Sadly, this Parliament will end in the way that it has proceeded—

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The right hon. Gentleman has spoken on business motions through most of the Session. Why is he surprised at today's motion, given that similar motions have been taken formally at this stage of the House's proceedings for the past 30 years?

Mr. Forth: I can imagine that that happened because for most of that time, we had a lousy Opposition who did not do their job properly. In opposition, the right hon. Lady's party clearly neglected its parliamentary duties and let everything go through on the nod. Things have changed.

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman's concern is even more surprising because, in what is known as the wash-up period in the previous Parliament, some 16 pieces of legislation were put on the statute book. One of them was an education Bill, on which the right hon. Gentleman was leading for the then Government.

Mr. Forth: I am delighted to say that I was able to conduct my business easily because there was no opposition to it. As I said, times have changed. We may have different roles in the next Parliament, and we shall have to see how we get on.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My right hon. Friend does not normally need defending, but the gravamen of the criticism from the Leader of the House on these occasions always seems to be that he was in the past an unquestioning, compliant, ambitious and possibly even sycophantic Member of Conservative Governments. Will my right hon. Friend take it from me that even if he did commit those sins, everything that he has done in this Parliament has completely made up for his errors of commission in the past?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as ever. However, something of a metamorphosis often takes place among Members of Parliament, depending on whether they are in opposition or in government. I say in the most kindly way to the Leader of the House that the same might even be said to have happened to her.

Whether or not we are in what the Leader of the House quaintly called a wash-up period, we are doing parliamentary business and we are legislating. It seems to have become fashionable, certainly on the Government Benches and, regrettably, among some of my colleagues as well, that legislation is a matter of formality. The idea is that we all operate, if possible, in a horrible consensual way, agree on what is generally good, but do not get around to good old-fashioned scrutiny or good old-fashioned opposition.

I may be a lone voice in this matter, but as long as I am a Member of this House—which I will be until Monday—I will stick to the old-fashioned view that almost everything done by any Government should be viewed with the greatest suspicion, and that the job of the Opposition is to scrutinise, delay, harry and make a nuisance of themselves until they are satisfied that they have done everything they can to make legislation what it should be for the people of this country. It is a simple and unsophisticated view, but then, that is the sort of chap I am.

I approach this motion in the same spirit of simple, unsophisticated criticism. First, however, I should like to welcome an aspect of the motion. Now there is a turn-up for the books, and I hope that it will make the right hon. Lady's day. Paragraph (2) of the motion says:

> "At the sittings on Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, Government business may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour".

That is a faint echo of the way things used to be. We are being given a proper opportunity for proper parliamentary scrutiny of Government business. I guarantee to the right hon. Lady that it will be opposed—at least, I hope that I can guarantee it. That is, after all, what we are here for. However, I find it encouraging that the business can be conducted until any hour. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front and Back Benches will welcome the measure and take every opportunity that it presents.

That is my word of welcome to the Government and the Leader of the House for uncharacteristically generously allowing a proper amount of time for our proceedings. In a way, it answers the question that I put to the right hon. Lady a short while ago. Given the structure and flow of business that we anticipate over the next two

[Mr. Forth]

parliamentary days, and given that, as the right hon. Lady has indicated, we expect a number of amendments to come to us from another place but do not yet know the number, range and quality of those amendments, the motion, very wisely, allows us a proper amount of time in which to consider them. That is good news. However, it is probably the only good news that I can find in the motion.

Paragraph (4) of the motion says:

> "the requirements of paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) shall be dispensed with".

I am always suspicious when I see such a provision. How do the Government expect us to react to it? When any Standing Order is dispensed with, we are entitled to be anxious. The point of Standing Orders is to provide the House with a structured way of proceeding with its business and to reassure all Members that their interests will be protected. Again, it is a matter of regret that no Minister—neither the Leader of the House nor anyone else—has sought to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, to explain why this rather casual dispensation with key elements of Standing Orders is being put before us, to which we are presumably expected to give our uncritical and admiring approval. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), the shadow Leader of the House, will have something to say about that.

Paragraph (5) says:

> "At this day's sitting, any Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill ordered to be brought in and read the first time"—

any such Bill, regardless of its contents, size, scale or substance—

> "shall be proceeded with as if its Second Reading stood as an Order of the day".

That sounds very like our old friend "deemed", under a slightly different guise. The motion does not actually say "deemed" because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, that can be a bit of a red rag to some of us bulls—

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): And heifers.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend want that remark on the record?

Mrs. Browning *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Forth: She does not, but it will be now, I am afraid, because she will get a note from *Hansard* any minute.

The motion may not say "deemed", but I read it as being rather similar.

I want to clarify several points. First, am I to take that paragraph literally as it reads—that any Bill shall be brought in and read the First time and proceeded with as though we had had the Second Reading anyway? So now we are doing away with Second Readings. I thought that the Government had gone far enough already—they have done away with nearly everything else in the House. This must be the ultimate—the ultimate put-on, the ultimate sin, the ultimate act of arrogance. We shall not even have Second Readings any more. We shall simply accept legislation, give it a quick nod through, and bob's your uncle.

I suspect, if I know anything, and if I know the Government at all, that this could involve quite a large sum of money. In fact, if we turn the page, we can see that it probably does involve a large sum of money, not unadjacent to—it could not be £144 billion, could it, by any chance? We could not be being asked, could we, Mr. Speaker, to nod through £144 billion and loose change without even a Second Reading?

I hope that the Treasury Ministers who are sitting in the Chamber looking very pleased with themselves at the moment will do the House the courtesy of seeking to catch your eye at some stage, Mr. Speaker, and explain why 144 billion quid of taxpayers' money should be nodded through without even a Second Reading.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Is my right hon. Friend aware of any precedents—apart from the deeming, which we debated at great length and with great consternation in this place? Are there precedents for dispensing with Second Readings, and if so, does my right hon. Friend believe that the judiciary might find that of some note when considering the interpretation of statute in due course?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that very interesting and useful point. I hope that the motion does not create or provide a precedent, because I could just imagine that in some future Parliament, were there to be another Labour Government of this kind, they might well seek to introduce a measure such as this and then quote this precedent and say, "But it was done before, and that was okay."

Is not the sole point of a motion like this—which, I am glad to say, can be debated until any hour, which is very reassuring to me, at least—to bring out matters such as this and at least to place on the record the fact that some Members of Parliament are unhappy about this; that some Members of Parliament do care, even at this stage of this Session of this Parliament; and that nodding through £144 billion is not our idea of parliamentary scrutiny? There is something for my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench to think about. Perhaps they do not think that £144 billion is very much, but I do, so it is another question that we must answer for ourselves.

Paragraph (6) of the motion says—I suppose that I should give this a slightly qualified welcome because it involves you, Mr. Speaker—

> "At this day's sitting, Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any messages from the Lords shall have been received;"

so, quite properly, we are making provision for the House to be available properly to consider or to receive messages from another place.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Has my right hon. Friend given any consideration to what will happen if no such messages are received? Will we stay here, presumably for ever?

Mr. Forth: That is a glorious thought, and one that I would very much welcome—whether the electorate would welcome it, I do not know—but I do not read the motion in that way. I can see what my hon. Friend is getting at, but the motion says:

"until any messages . . . shall have been received;"

so, in the quaint but correct old grammar that we delight in here—I am pleased to say that we do—it is making proper provision for, but not necessarily tying us into, the receipt of such messages.

The point is that, in paragraph (6), we are celebrating the fact that we have two Houses of Parliament, both of which have an important role to play, and that even in this wash-up—to use the quaint phrase of the Leader of House, which seems to be her attempt to say, "All this is very trivial and does not matter too much, so why are we bothering with it?"—both Houses of Parliament have a role to play, so we, properly, will be here, waiting to hear what those in the other place may say. I hope that they have a lot to say about some of the rather ghastly Bills that will be put through Parliament before Dissolution.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend's interpretation of paragraph (6) might be unreasonably narrow. Given that the motion does not refer to a time limit—certainly not in relation to the receipt of Lords messages—will he reconsider and accept the possibility that our hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) is correct?

Mr. Forth: Our hon. Friend may be correct, but the combination of paragraph (2)—which I welcome, as it states that Government business on 10 and 11 May can be proceeded with until any hour—and paragraph (6) offers some interesting possibilities. However, all this will, of course, depend on what Members of the other place decide to do to the pretty revolting Bills that are still washing about in the parliamentary system. I should like to think that we could somehow prevent them from reaching the statute book. I should also like to think that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will resist them stoutly, but I have been a Member long enough not to be too optimistic about that.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I seek clarification from my right hon. Friend? The phrase,

"any messages from the Lords shall have been received"

is used in paragraph (6). Does he assume that the word "received" includes the term "considered", because I believe that both those words are important? Will he consider that point?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who, as the very respected, influential and extremely senior Chairman of the Procedure Committee, knows about such things better than almost anyone else. I had not thought of the point that he makes, but I wish to consider it immediately.

My hon. Friend raises the intriguing possibility that we could not adjourn on 10 May until we had received a message, which we would then consider on 11 May, but what about those messages received on 11 May? Presumably, we should have to continue to sit while what we in the trade rather quaintly know as ping-pong takes place between the House and another place and until either everyone gets tired and goes away, which I hope will be the case, or the ghastly Bills involved receive Royal Assent and finally come to rest on the statute book, which I hope will not be the case. One way or another, the motion offers some intriguing possibilities about what could happen during the open-ended, unlimited parliamentary days on 10 and 11 May.

Of course, as my hon. Friend knows better than most, another peculiarity is that if the parliamentary day of 10 May were to continue until 9.30 the following morning, 11 May would not exist. So the intriguing possibility that arises, even as I speak, is that, as I understand our procedures, we may find ourselves with a lot of business on 10 May because another place had happily sought to amend those ghastly Bills considerably. If the Government wanted to resist that process and if, even with closure motions, we considered the business through the night on 10 May and past 9.30 the following morning, 11 May could not exist as a parliamentary day. That, in turn, raises some very intriguing possibilities, if we were to approve the motion. If the Government have committed themselves to Dissolution on Monday 14 May, we may well face the possibility of the Bills that they think they will obtain not being passed.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I find my right hon. Friend's train of thought extremely helpful. Will he extend it a little further? If the House were to continue sitting, not only might we lose the 11th, but we might also lose the 12th, the 13th and the 14th. Does he consider that, if the 14th did not exist because we were still sitting, it would be possible to dissolve Parliament on a day that did not exist?

Mr. Forth: The Government are in trouble; the more we examine this possibility, the more matters spin delightfully out of control. I suspect that the people of Bromley and Chislehurst want the coming election like a hole in the head. I suspect that that is mainly because they are entirely satisfied with their existing representation in the House. However, were the election not to take place because of Government cock-ups, and it looks as though we are entering that territory—

Mr. Winterton: Wash-ups!

Mr. Forth: Wash-ups or cock-ups, I can tell my hon. Friend that no tears will be shed in Bromley and Chislehurst.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): May I take issue with my right hon. Friend? Is not what he says nonsense on stilts? The stilts are that he bases all his arguments on his belief that the Government will live and abide by traditional parliamentary practices, while the truth is that they will simply crush the Opposition, if necessary with guillotines, and will ensure that we depart when they want us to do so.

Mr. Forth: I have never regarded my hon. Friend as crushable. He certainly does not look crushable to me. As long as some of my right hon. and hon. Friends are in this place, representing their constituents and taking their parliamentary duties seriously, crushing will not come into the question. Certainly, we are finding that, as we probe this ill-thought-out motion, it is defective and has not properly considered the possibilities that lie before us. I now realise, having reached this part of my analysis,

[Mr. Forth]

why Ministers did not try to introduce the motion in the normal way: either they were ashamed of it, or they realised that it was defective or, as is more likely—although I freely admit that that would be uncharacteristic of the Leader of the House—they did not want to submit themselves to parliamentary scrutiny. I exonerate the Leader of the House entirely from that accusation because she is fearless and would be more than prepared to face any criticism.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: The exchanges between my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) follow the train of thought that I was pondering while trying to interpret the rather difficult wording of the motion. Does it seem to my right hon. Friend that the drafting may have been in error? The rather arrogant assumption has been made that we are so used to programme motions and unused to holding debates until any hour that this technique has been used—completely forgetting that the parliamentary day may not be a calendar day, thus giving rise to potential confusion and great constitutional dilemma.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Although he has not been a Member of the House for as long as many—indeed most—his mastery of the intricacies of parliamentary procedure is most impressive. I congratulate him on that. The only fly in all that ointment is my tiny inkling of doubt as to how far my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench are determined to run the Government ragged during the next two parliamentary days.

Mrs. Browning: I am hurt to the quick that my right hon. Friend should even suggest that there is any question that the official Opposition will not run the Government ragged whenever they get the chance. He knows that the allegation is most unjust. I must ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. Forth: I do not want to be drawn too deeply into that analysis. Perhaps my hon. Friend and I can talk about it in the Tea Room—much later, when this debate has matured. We are only making our opening shots at present; indeed, so far I am the only speaker. As the debate is blessed—unusually—by being tabled for "any hour", I can say with some confidence that my hon. Friend's visit to the Tea Room with me will be delayed for a while longer.

Mr. Bercow: I am now immensely perturbed by my right hon. Friend's comments—

Mr. Winterton: Too mellifluous?

Mr. Bercow: I do not think that they have been mellifluous. In fact, I find rather alarming the suggestion that if we lose Friday 11 May as a parliamentary day, paragraph (8) of the motion—with each word of which the Leader of the House will be familiar—will immediately fall and it will not, therefore, be possible to reconvene the House on 14 May. Would it not be rather unfortunate if my surmise were correct, given that, if we could return on 14 May to engage in the extremely important debates that remain to be had, those debates could potentially be led by the Prime Minister, which would be most welcome because he would be present in the House and not hectoring and intimidating innocent south London schoolchildren?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is not prone to flights of fancy, but the suggestion that the Prime Minister would appear in the House is one of them and I do not take his comment seriously as a result.

However, the worrying possibility arises that Her Majesty the Queen might be kept waiting in Buckingham Palace, without knowing what is to happen. I do not know whether Her Majesty has been told by the Government or by the Prime Minister during his extremely brief visit yesterday what he thinks will happen, but I hope that she has been warned that, as a result of the defective nature of the motion, she might be kept waiting longer than she anticipated to give Royal Assent, if any of the ghastly Bills proceeds in that direction, as I hope none will.

Having explored the questions raised by paragraph (6), let us move on swiftly to paragraph (7), which rests on the assumption that there will be a sitting on Friday 11 May—a large question mark hangs over that one now, I grant. In the statement:

> "the House shall not adjourn until the Speaker shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses",

a rather large number of assumptions are implicit. The motion acknowledges, and we should remember, that both Houses are fully involved in the process. As for the reporting of Royal Assent, I assume that everyone—all 659 of us—will be present on that day, waiting for the Speaker to tell us whether or not Royal Assent has been granted. We should be in dereliction of our parliamentary duty were we not here, so I expect to see a full House on Friday 11 May, especially on the Government side—after all, a Government motion has said that the House shall be here, and it might even be thought disrespectful to Mr. Speaker if we were not here in our numbers to hear him report the Royal Assent to the Government's own Bills. I am not sure that the Opposition need to be here—I certainly do not want to hear that those ghastly Bills have received Royal Assent. However, I am sure that Government Members will want to be present, enthusiastic, keen, eager and joyous to hear that the Bills have finally got Royal Assent.

Leaving that question to one side, because it is not for me to delve too deeply into the extent to which Government Members welcome their Government's measures, we come to the most puzzling aspect of all. My question is largely technical in nature, but worth asking none the less. Paragraph (8) states

> "At its rising on Friday 11th May"—

a day that is now in doubt—

> "the House shall adjourn to Tuesday 15th May."

However, I distinctly heard the Leader of the House say earlier that Parliament would be dissolved on Monday 14 May. It might be another typographical error or an error of drafting—although I find that difficult to believe given the expertise of the Clerk and his colleagues—a cock-up or a piece of deception, self-deception or otherwise, but the question arises in my mind of how the House can adjourn to Tuesday 15 May when, as we have already been told, it is to be dissolved on Monday 14 May. That strikes me as some form of parliamentary oddity of which some explanation is required.

Mr. Winterton: I seek clarification on paragraph (2), which states:

> "At the sittings on Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, Government business may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour".

It does not specify what Government business. Hon. Members could have their own ideas about that. For example, we might want to include the borough of Macclesfield in the business rate relief scheme that has arisen from the foot and mouth outbreak. The constituency of the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), which is covered by the scheme, is hardly agricultural and rural, whereas 90 per cent. of the geographical area of Macclesfield is. Does my right hon. Friend believe that paragraph (2) allows such issues to be considered for debate?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has been here since the beginning of the debate and it has taken him nearly half an hour to mention Macclesfield and its interests, which he has looked after for 30 years. That must be something of a record. Although I welcome paragraph (2), I appreciate his intervention because the extent to which Government business might include items other than those mentioned by the Leader of the House needs clarification. She verified that there will be Treasury questions tomorrow and gave a list of the business to be dealt with. It remains to be seen whether it is an exhaustive list, although it certainly sounds as though it might be exhausting. The key consideration is that we could have another business statement tomorrow to change or add to business on Friday 11 May, were that to exist as a parliamentary day.

Although it is not for me to answer my hon. Friend—this is, after all, a Government motion—I shall do my best because I am the only person who has shown any interest in the debate, which I am also trying to initiate. I believe that Macclesfield could find its way on to the Order Paper on Friday as part of a Government business motion. He has got from now until the rising of the House to persuade the Government to do that. That is the best advice—as if he needed it—that I can give.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way a third time, especially as I follow my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who also represents the good county of Cheshire. I note that as the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) was fortuitously sitting behind the Treasury Minister, he was able to be briefed. With so many Ministers present on the Front Bench, we may well get an answer to my hon. Friend's query through the combination of our interventions.

I want to drag my right hon. Friend—possibly kicking and screaming—back to paragraph (7). On Royal Assent, the Government's plan to scrap community health councils is close to my heart and those of my constituents. Cheshire has excellent examples of community health councils. The other place has also shown grave concern on patients' behalf about the proposals to scrap those august institutions. They are worried about how they will operate. Does my right hon. Friend think that we will have an opportunity to understand the timetabling, in parliamentary day terms, and how the ping-pong will work? In the absence of any response from the Government, I have to seek answers from my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Forth: I shall do my best to oblige my hon. Friend. It is like the old days—I used to answer questions regularly at the Dispatch Box. It is with a sense of nostalgia that I find myself doing it today. I shall try to get myself back into that mood.

The Health and Social Care Bill, which covers community health councils, was mentioned by the Leader of the House as part of tomorrow's business. That much we do know. So an opportunity—I suspect that it might be limited—will arise to deal with such matters. As Cheshire is so generously and magnificently represented today, I assume that the same will apply tomorrow and that it will be possible for hon. Members to raise such issues. Whether the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) will be in critical or obsequious mode tomorrow remains to be seen. Only time will tell. I have been dragged back reluctantly to considering paragraph (2)—I welcomed it earlier—but its wording suggests that the issue that my hon. Friend has mentioned will be covered because the Bill is Government business. We will certainly oppose the aspect of the Bill that he mentioned, and my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton assured us that we shall oppose vigorously almost everything in sight. That is very welcome news, so I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) has grounds for optimism.

Mr. Swayne *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I am trying to conclude my remarks, but I will give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Swayne: My right hon. Friend will acknowledge that he rather skated over the provisions in paragraph (3). Having decoded the paragraph, my understanding is that it will allow us to have proper Divisions and that there will be no deferred Divisions. I hope that he will have a few words of welcome for that even though it clearly suggests that we might have to decide on any number of Government orders.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is quite right. In my anxiety to skip quickly through the motion and to give ample time for other hon. Members to speak, I probably did not do justice to paragraph (3). Like him I had some difficulty decoding it, but if it means that these ghastly, irrelevant nonsenses of deferred Divisions are to be put aside, I will very much welcome the provision. I do not take part in deferred Divisions as a point of high principle. They are an insult, an irrelevance and nonsense—I do not do them. I strongly recommend that approach to all my right hon. and hon. Friends. If we are given an opportunity to vote properly on matters that would normally be deferred, that will be a welcome step. Subject to clarification from Ministers—as opposed to me answering all the questions—we could give a rather generous welcome to paragraph (3).

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I shall give way, but probably for the last time. I shall try to conclude my remarks to allow my

[Mr. Forth]

hon. Friends to seek to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I sense that there is a real enthusiasm for this debate, and I very much welcome that.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. His generosity of spirit invariably gets the better of him as the House is always aware. He will agree that our hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) has performed a signal service.

Mr. Forth: As ever.

Mr. Bercow: As ever, as my right hon. Friend poignantly observes. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West has performed a signal service in drawing attention to the tortuous wording of paragraph (3). Has my right hon. Friend noticed that that tortuous construction refers to a scenario in which the opinion of the Speaker is challenged? Surely such a scenario is positively unimaginable.

Mr. Forth: I certainly take my hon. Friend's advice on that—he should know. I must admit that I thought that I would skip over that part of the motion because it raises certain sensitivities. We would probably be better to draw a veil over them and leave the Government to explain why they admit of the possibility of the Speaker being challenged. That is not a matter for my hon. Friend or myself; it is certainly a matter for the Government. I bet that someone will find himself on the carpet when the Speaker is apprised of the words in paragraph (3). We had better leave it as a matter for the Speaker and Government.

Mr. Winterton: Order—*[Laughter.]* I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am used to listening intently from a different position.

My right hon. Friend is a highly respected Member of the House and the utterances of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) are always fascinating and flowery, but the wording of paragraph (3) is entirely appropriate. When, at the end of the debate, the Speaker decides that the ayes have it, Members on the other side can say "No" and that means that there is a Division. I hope that my right hon. Friend will concede that the Division is the appropriate means by which the House should operate. I am seeking to be helpful.

Mr. Forth: If I can find one other Member to be a Teller, I can virtually guarantee that that will happen.

I am surprised that my hon. Friend thought that he was in Westminster Hall, over which he presides with such distinction, because I have never set foot in the ghastly place and never intend to; I would not darken its doors. I regard it as an excrescence and irrelevance, and the sooner that we do away with it, the better. However, I do not want to digress.

I see that I am reaching the limit of your patience, Madam Deputy Speaker; I do not want to exhaust the patience of the House. I thought that I would skip lightly through some of the salient elements of the motion, and hope that I have interested the House and my hon. Friends enough for them to think that it is worth them asking questions. Following my few words, I hope that Ministers will tell us something about those matters, as we have winkled out of the motion a few relevant, important and disturbing facts that require clarification.

4.56 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Our debate has a serious kernel, and we are trying to deal with it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) should not get too excited about returning to the tradition of having a debate until any hour. I suspect that if our debate ran on, and even if perfectly serious points were made, the Government would move a closure motion at about 7.17 pm, three hours after we started at 4.17 pm.

The Government are ruthless about getting their own way and would not allow a situation to develop in which the House of Commons could perform its traditional function at any length. Looking down the Order Paper, I see that the Finance Bill programme motion may continue for up to 45 minutes, as may the programme motion for the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill. The Government always ensure that, whatever happens and whatever the Opposition say, we are sent home at the witching hour of 10 o'clock, as it is not considered right for us to be here trying to scrutinise the Government after that time.

That is my first point. My second is the wider issue of how we are to proceed in the coming days. It is true that the business this Session has been an exceptionally light. It is also true that everybody has known the date of the general election for some time; there has been no mystery about it. Everybody knows that the Government would have liked to hold the election in May, but that was not possible because of the foot and mouth outbreak, so it was delayed.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the motion that we are discussing is the business of the House, not the date of the general election.

Mr. Leigh: I appreciate that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am asking why, when everybody knows when Parliament is to be dissolved, it is not possible for more time to be allowed. After all, these are serious motions and Bills. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the House was given so little warning, and an impossible burden put on the Opposition. Most of the Bills that we will discuss in the next few days are popular and perfectly sensible, and the Opposition do not want to oppose them on principle—*[Interruption.]* Well, some, but not all, of them.

Mrs. Beckett: Before the hon. Gentleman gets any deeper into the hole that he is digging for himself, I remind him that in the Session of 1982 to 1983, Parliament dealt with 10 Bills; in 1986 to 1987, it dealt with 14; in 1991 to 1992, it dealt with 11; in 1996 to 1997, it dealt with 16. I simply say to him that, contrary to the pointless remarks made by him and his right hon. and hon. Friends, the more that Opposition Members go on, the more apparent they make it that they expect never to be in government again; I sincerely hope that they are right.

Mr. Leigh: All that the right hon. Lady is saying is that we have not conducted our affairs very well in the past; we sandwiched an enormous amount of consideration into a short period, which, presumably, did not result in the right sort of scrutiny, so we should carry on as before. I am sure that when our business was conducted as it was previously and the right hon. Lady was sitting on the Opposition Benches, she also objected and felt that her point of view was not taken sufficiently into account, because she was in a minority. Why do we not take legislation seriously? Why do we not have a procedure that ensures that Bills undergo proper consideration?

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. With the greatest respect to the Leader of the House—she knows that I respect her—I could not give a tinker's cuss about what happened in 1983, because at the time I was busily preoccupied with my university studies. Although we are not here to debate the date of the general election—as you poignantly reminded us, Madam Deputy Speaker—the fact that the Government propose to hold the election 327 days before it needs to be called is relevant to our consideration of the motion. Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government want to cut and run, there is no reason why we should be accommodating in our attitude? Rather, to adapt the words of our noble Friend Lord Tebbit of Chingford, we should invite Ministers to get on their bicycles and pedal them.

Mr. Leigh: The Government chose to prorogue Parliament earlier than they needed to. We on the Opposition Benches are perfectly entitled to insist that the remaining Bills are not rushed through and that there is proper scrutiny. I am sure that if the right hon. Lady were on these Benches, she would say exactly the same. Contrary to what she said, we have heard much from the Government about the need to modernise our procedures. Only today we heard from various quarters about the declining ability of the House to scrutinise the Executive. Why are we still dealing with our affairs in the same way as we did a few years ago, and not giving proper—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I once again remind the hon. Gentleman of the motion that we are discussing and how limited it is?

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Discussion of the motion is not simply a matter of the esteem in which my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) may hold the Leader of the House or the Government. It is also a matter of the impression created by the motion outside the House and the pressures that it exerts on Parliament. People who are intimately associated with the measures that we are to debate over the next few days will not understand why the House is giving scant consideration to matters that they believe, with some justification, are of paramount importance. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) should not be intimidated by the right hon. Lady quoting historical facts and figures, which go way beyond the experience of the vast majority of hon. Members in the Chamber. I hope that my hon. Friend will continue to fight the cause of his constituents in Gainsborough, mine in South Holland and The Deepings, and the wider public.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments.

My second point relates to the extinguishment of private Members' rights. Government business will take precedence over that of private Members. It is regrettable—I see my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst in his place—that it has proved impossible for private Members to enact their Bills during this Parliament. There is no point in Government Members complaining about Opposition Members who have sought to scrutinise such Bills; that is our right. My right hon. Friend is right to come here Friday after Friday, hold private Members to account and subject their Bills to scrutiny.

Despite the fact that everybody knew when Parliament was to be prorogued—presumably the Government have known that for weeks—the Government have produced a business motion that will prevent any private Members' Bills from making progress. Some excellent private Members' Bills have been presented, such as the Christmas Day (Trading) Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), but the Government are entirely ruthless and kill off all such Bills.

With all the notice that we have had, and with everyone knowing for weeks, if not months, when the general election would be held, would it not have been possible for the Government to introduce a business motion that ensured that the rights of private Members were not extinguished? Is that fair? Is that right? Is that the proper way for Parliament to proceed?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words. Is he aware that the vast majority of private Members' Bills are killed off by the Government Whip objecting to them? The Christmas Day (Trading) Bill, which would have been on the Order Paper for this Friday, is not supported and may even be opposed by the Government. That may explain what is going on.

Mr. Leigh: Yes. Regrettably, we often conduct our affairs with a lack of honesty. The Government cried crocodile tears and said to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, "We're terribly sorry. It's an excellent and worthwhile Bill, but there wasn't time." Presumably the Government are delighted that it will be killed off—perhaps they have friends in big business who dropped them a word. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich should have been allowed to proceed with her Bill, which had broad support in the House. How could anyone want people to work on Christmas day? The Government are not being honest. Surely, with their majority, their authority and their ability to plan—they make the rules and control this place—they could have ensured that one of their own distinguished Members was given a chance to bring her private Member's Bill to a conclusion. Why this ruthless haste? Why has no consideration been given to the rights of private Members?

I hope that when we next consider these matters—perhaps in the Modernisation Committee—it will not be beyond the wit of Parliament to devise a means that allows us to plan a little, work out how many Bills need to go through and ensure that there is not the unseemly rush that we have had this time and, I accept, on previous occasions. We should ensure proper consideration of legislation right up to the end of the Parliament. Why else are we timetabling Bills? Why else is the Leader of the House telling us that the conduct of affairs in the past has not been adequate?

[Mr. Leigh]

It is true that Oppositions have used the weapon of time, but that is the only weapon available to us. Should we be criticised for that? Should a small minority be criticised for trying to hold the Government to account by using the weapon of time? Did not the Labour party do precisely that? The right hon. Lady said that times have changed.

Mrs. Beckett: I want to correct the error that the hon. Gentleman is making. I do not criticise the Opposition for using time to discuss issues before the House. I would not do that, as that is their role. I criticise them for wasting time talking about how much time they are going to take.

Mr. Leigh: That was a patronising remark from the Leader of the House, wielding as she does enormous authority over our affairs. This is crucial—it is not a little, quibbling, debating point. It is vital in a democracy that the Government decide on the business and on what gets passed, whereas the Opposition decide what gets debated. That is our right, and it is how Oppositions hold Governments to account.

I accept the right hon. Lady's point that this is how we have always dealt with these matters in the past, but if she wants to go down in history as a modernising Leader of the House and to sweep away the nonsense of Oppositions filibustering and time wasting, and if she wants serious debate on the issues so that every amendment is reached, every part of every Bill is scrutinised and we provide our constituents with a proper service, she should introduce some worthwhile reform if she remains in her office.

Mrs. Browning: I gently remind my hon. Friend that, after 7 June when we have a Conservative Government, there will be no such thing as a Modernisation Committee.

Mr. Leigh: If the Conservative party is returned, as I sincerely hope it will be, it is vital that it reforms our procedures in the first six months. All Oppositions have good intentions—the Leader of the House had good intentions—but once that window of opportunity passes and a party has been in power for a few months, those good intentions about holding the Executive to account fall to pieces. How much progress have we made on reforming Select Committees and giving them real power? How much progress have we made on the matters that I have been discussing? Very little.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): If the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues reduced the amount of verbosity, we might have a chance later to debate motion 8 on estimates, which gives the Government permission to spend £149 billion. That is the sort of motion that the House should be debating, rather than spending too long discussing what is, as the Leader of the House has pointed out, a traditional motion.

Mr. Leigh: That is an example of what Oppositions are told. We are told that it is all our fault that the House cannot debate—in this instance—motion 8, which involves a huge amount of money, because certain Members have done what they are paid to do, and held the Government to account. But it is the Government who have stated on the Order Paper next to motion 8 that there will be no debate after 10 pm—no debate on a motion involving £149 billion. Does it not sum up the current Parliament that, if people do their job properly, it is perfectly possible for there to be no debate on the spending of £149 billion?

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend's erudition is matched only by his conscientious representation of the people of Gainsborough.

Will my hon. Friend consider for a moment the deep irony contained in the intervention of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey)? He says that we should have more time in which to debate a matter that appears later on the Order Paper, yet makes no complaint about the way in which the current Parliament is being ended—about the fact that we are not being given more time over the next few days, perhaps weeks, to debate all these matters at greater length. If we were given more time, could we not engage in a fuller debate on both this motion and the matters that the hon. Gentleman seems so keen to discuss?

Mr. Leigh: It is indeed ironic that a member of an Opposition party, and many of his colleagues, should take every opportunity not to do their duty, hold the Government to account and attack them in connection with this or any other motion, but to attack the official Opposition, as though we were responsible—as though it were all our fault, and we had drafted the Order Paper in this way. We had no control over the Order Paper: no one consulted us. The business is simply being rammed through Parliament.

Mr. Davey: I was making a deeper point about the way in which we conduct our business. Under successive Governments of both blue and red persuasions, we have not debated public finance properly. We need to hold the Government to account, and the recommendations of the hon. Gentleman's party to the Norton Commission do not do that. That is why we should change the priorities of the House, so that we can scrutinise the way in which taxpayers' money is spent.

Mr. Leigh: That is a serious point, which I am happy to take on board. I agree that the reason why we have this Parliament at all—the reason why we are here, and the reason why our authority has grown so much since the 17th century—is that the general public placed confidence in us, and our ability to scrutinise the Executive in regard to the spending of public money. It is extraordinary that this evening we shall spend so little time—conceivably, no time at all—performing our primary function, and holding the Government to account on motion 8, entitled "Estimates, 2001-02".

I do not know whether hon. Members saw Simon Schama's programme about the civil war on BBC television last night. That was the origin of our House—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I please remind the hon. Gentleman once more of the narrowness of this debate?

Mr. Leigh: It is indeed a narrow debate, but despite its narrowness it reveals enormously deep and important issues that the House ignores at its peril if it is to continue to perform its primary function of holding the Government to account. That is what we have sought to do over the past four years; I am simply trying to protect the Labour party's position over the next four years, when Labour Members will be sitting on this side of the House.

5.14 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Let me begin by commenting on the two interventions from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). In his second intervention he said that the House does not scrutinise expenditure properly: I agree with him, and will deal with his point shortly.

The hon. Gentleman's first intervention, however, provides a useful starting point for consideration of the issues arising from the narrow motion that we are discussing. He said that, if the official Opposition were to spend less time scrutinising what the Labour Government were trying to do with democracy in this House, it would be possible to reach item 8 sooner, but that is not correct. If my arithmetic is any good, it will not be possible, whatever happens this afternoon, to get to item 8 before 10 o'clock. That tells us a great deal about the contempt in which the Labour Government hold democracy and the way in which the House exercises it.

If there had been no personal statement and no ten-minute Bill, we would have started with the statement for tomorrow's business and moved to this motion. Even if the motion had gone through on the nod, as the Leader of the House seemed to want, we would still have faced two programme motions of three quarters of an hour each: a total of an hour and a half. We would then have had a guillotined debate lasting three hours and another guillotined debate lasting two hours, which amounts to six and a half hours. If we had started on all that at half-past 3 and not had any of the debate that we have had this afternoon, and if there had been no Divisions—presumably, the Labour Government do not believe that we have a right to vote on anything any more; it is rather inconvenient for their view of democracy—it would have been 10 o'clock before we reached item 8. If we look at the programme motion, the Order Paper and the Standing Orders, we discover that we cannot debate any estimate matter after 10 o'clock, so the reality is not as the hon. Gentleman believed it to be.

When the Government argue that if we had not debated this motion we could have reached the estimates debate, they are talking rubbish. We would not have got on to the debate on the estimates. We would have again been required to act as a rubber-stamp for a Labour dictatorship who have no regard for the House.

Mr. Hayes: The point that I was trying to make in an earlier intervention, which I hope my hon. Friend will take on board, is that if all the business had not been crammed into today and we had continued to sit into next week, which would have been entirely possible, full debates on the matters that he has mentioned would have been possible, and perhaps a debate on the estimates as well, as requested by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey).

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He makes his point for himself and I can do no more than agree.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) again demonstrated what a generous and kind man he is. He estimated that the Government might decide to move a closure motion after three hours. My hon. Friend's generosity disguises a truth about the Labour Government: I cannot remember one occasion when they have allowed a debate to go on for three hours when they could bring it to a halt in half an hour, one hour, one and a half hours or two hours. My hon. Friend might be proved right, but I suspect that he will not be. His generosity leads him to be kind to the Government; perhaps I am not usually so charitable.

During my hon. Friend's speech, there was an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton, I believe it is.

Mr. Bercow: And Honiton.

Mr. Wilshire: And Honiton. Long may she remain the hon. Member for both places. Her intervention has made this entire debate worth while. She pledged from the Front Bench that, on 8 June, we shall get rid of what the Labour party euphemistically calls the Modernisation Committee, which I believe to be the stifling of democracy Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I again remind hon. Members just how narrow this debate is?

Mr. Wilshire: I understand the point that you make, Madam Deputy Speaker.

In two interventions on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough, the Leader of the House made two very interesting points that are pertinent to the motion, the first of which was made after a large number of files were brought into the Chamber. That timing suggests not only that the Leader of the House was not willing to speak to the motion at the beginning of the debate and was simply hoping that it would be passed on the nod, but that she was ill-prepared to speak to it. It was only after the files arrived that we were given statistics that we could use to compare the Government's objective of ramming through certain Bills in the next two or three days with previous practice. I tried to write down her comments accurately, and I hope that I have understood her correctly. If I have not and she is listening, she will probably be able to correct me. I am not trying to misquote her in any way.

My understanding is that 10 Bills were passed at the end of the 1983 Parliament; 14 Bills at the end of the 1987 Parliament; 11 Bills at the end of the 1992 Parliament; and 16 Bills at the end of the 1997 Parliament. Subsequently, we were invited to compare those figures with what she considers to be the modest amount of legislation that the House is being asked to consider in the next two or three days.

Some of my hon. Friends take the view that what happened in the past was unfortunate, but I am not so sure about that. I accept that the party that wins the general election is entitled to legislate and is quite right to introduce as many Bills as it believes it can pass. I accept that train of thought, but the Leader of the House seems to be saying, "See how modest our list of Bills is", whereas I would say that the list is pathetically short [illegible] the Government had anything worth doing—rather than

[Mr. Wilshire]

dithering, posturing, spinning and only seeming to be in control of this country—and were really trying to tackle problems, their list might stand better comparison with the figures that we have just been given.

Mr. Forth: Would my hon. Friend accept an amendment to the words that he has just offered to the House, when he said that an elected Government are entitled to legislate? An elected Government are entitled to put legislation before the House of Commons and the House of Lords and to persuade the majority of those Houses to pass that legislation. That is an elected Government's entitlement; no more, no less.

Mr. Wilshire: That is absolutely right. My right hon. Friend anticipates a point that I want to deal with in a moment or two.

Although I believe that a Government are entitled to introduce Bills and that the Government perhaps stand condemned out of their own mouths for having no real substance to put to the House and to the country, I do not believe that the Government have any right to object to Opposition Members doing properly that which we are here to do, which is to stop them. I make no apologies for trying to frustrate by any means that are legitimately at my disposal a Government whom I consider to be dreadful and damaging to my country and whom I want to remove from office as quickly as I can.

In her second intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough, the Leader of the House seemed to say that it was up to her to say what Opposition Members should be saying. She complained about the way in which we are debating the motion and the points that we are making. There we have it: the Government are trying not only to destroy democracy and silence their own Back Benchers, but to write the Opposition's script in this place. I hope that, for those who listen to our debates, that demonstrates the contempt in which we are held by a Government whose time has come.

I hope that the performance of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was broadcast live in Bromley. It is absolutely crucial that his electors understand what a brilliant representative they have in this place and how wise they would be to return him with an even bigger majority. It was a tour de force. I am quite glad that I was not called immediately after him, as it would have been a very difficult act to follow.

I do not know whether you had the live feed on in your office before you entered the Chamber, Madam Deputy Speaker. If you did, you would have witnessed a spectacle that the public should see more often. The House was asked to consider a motion, yet the Minister with responsibility for it did not even bother to stand up and explain it. When challenged as to why that was, the right hon. Lady said that it was because of a tradition that such motions went through on the nod—and that coming from a Government who praise the idea of a Modernisation Committee! It was suggested that all that we were doing was "washing up". My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said earlier that the Government were indeed all washed up; that much I agree with. However, I do not agree with the idea that we are just tidying up a few loose ends.

If the Leader of the House were consistent in her train of thought, she could not continue to say that the important thing is to modernise the House, because to appeal to tradition as a reason for not bothering to debate something makes nonsense of the modernisation to which she so often lays claim.

"Times have changed," people keep telling me—but one thing that has not changed is Labour Members' unwillingness to bother to take part in debates—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. One thing that definitely has not changed is the business before the House, and the narrowness of that debate.

Mr. Wilshire: I am grateful to you for making that point, Madam Deputy Speaker, because it brings me to the fact that it was suggested that there would be another business statement tomorrow. I therefore suggest that another such motion will come before us tomorrow, and that a number of my colleagues will want to make a range of points about it.

May I move on to the motion before us in some detail? I am mystified as to why there is such a last-minute panic. Why have we been asked to consider all these ways of truncating debate and rubber-stamping the business before us? We have known since the last Queen's Speech that the election was coming—and I am sure that the Government knew, too. We have had so little business that it could have been finished long ago—yet now we are being asked to deal with it in such a great rush that we cannot debate it.

In fact, we have had an eight-week delay, because the election was going to be in April, then in May, and now it is to be in June. That was another eight weeks in which we could have done all this, and there would have been no need for the motion before us.

As the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton, said, much of the motion concerns spending. We should consider the implications of that for a moment. The ability of this House to control expenditure and the raising of tax is one of the primary reasons why we are here. It is highly significant that those very areas are at risk because of the motion that we are considering.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting point. He made another one earlier, about the workings of Standing Order No. 55, and how dreadful it is that we are not allowed to discuss appropriation matters after 10 o'clock. Perhaps I could remind him, and the rest of the House, that although his description of that Standing Order is correct, it was last amended on 20 March 1997, not only under the Government whom he, like all Conservative Members, supported—and in which some of them served—but during what we are now on the record as calling the "wash-up" period of the previous Parliament. At that time, as the hon. Gentleman may recall, the House adjourned earlier than it needed to, and we had a very long election campaign right at the end of a full five-year Parliament.

Mr. Wilshire: I find that an interesting comment. It suggests to me that some Opposition Members are prepared to reflect on the past and see whether we can improve on it, whereas the Government are perfectly happy to fall back, when it suits their convenience, on what happened before. When that does not suit their convenience, they try to stifle democracy by doing other things. I hear what the right hon. Lady said, but that was no sort of a point: it simply left her Government exposed for what they are.

Mr. Bercow: I hope and trust that my hon. Friend will not be deflected from the sound points that he is making. Does he agree that if the House had sat on more Fridays, and had not effectively played truant both in February and over Easter, there would be no need for the unseemly haste with which we are now considering matters?

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend is right, and I sincerely hope that I shall not be deflected by interventions from the Leader of the House.

The motion addresses two fundamental matters that the House should be considering: taxation and expenditure. It took us many years to wrest those issues away from the monarch. In the end, it took a civil war before Parliament obtained the powers that it now has over expenditure.

Mr. Edward Davey: While the hon. Gentleman considers the past and control over public expenditure, will he comment on the fact that not since 1919 has the House rejected an expenditure Question from the Executive?

Mr. Wilshire: I was not here in 1919, so I do not know what debate took place then. If the hon. Gentleman was present, perhaps he will enlighten me later in the Tea Room as to what part he played in the debate.

We are being asked to curtail powers that it took us all that time to get away from the monarch, and that is why we should take this motion seriously. Paragraph (1) of the motion states

> "Government business shall have precedence".

That means precedence over private Members' business, and that demonstrates the contempt in which the Government hold Back Benchers. Not a single private Member's Bill will have reached the statute book in this Session, despite the lack of Government legislation. Even at the last minute, when that mistake could be remedied, the Government intend to prevent further progress on private Members' Bills.

Paragraph (2) states that the House may continue "until any hour". I raised my concern on that point with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, but he was not able to give me an answer. If the Leader of the House would be so kind as to listen to the debate, she might be able to help. My right hon. Friend made the point that the motion would allow us to continue debate on Thursday until any hour. If we continued until half-past nine the following morning, Friday would not exist. My point that if we were able, because of the substance of the debate, to continue beyond that point through Saturday and Sunday, we would arrive at half-past nine on Monday, at which point Monday would not exist. The Government have announced that the Queen has agreed to dissolve Parliament on Monday 14 May, but if the debate continues until 9.30 on Monday morning, that day will not exist. I would like the Leader of the House to tell us whether it is possible to dissolve a Parliament on a day that does not exist. If she cannot give us a satisfactory answer, the only conclusion can be that we will have to have another business motion which we shall have to examine and consider. We might then also lose Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of next week.

Paragraph (3) refers to deferred Divisions, which I considered an abomination when they were introduced. They turn this House into a chat shop, where decisions are not taken on the basis of what has been said in debate but at the convenience of the Government, using us as a rubber stamp. We were told that the introduction of deferred Divisions was part of modernisation, but when it suits the Government's purpose they want to forget all about them. Where is the justice, the fairness, the democracy and the respect for the procedures of the House when the Government say, "When we want to use the House as a rubber stamp by having afternoon Divisions, we will do so, but when it suits us we will forget all that and do things differently"? The Government have made a trap for themselves. Time and again in debates on modernisation, we have told them that they do not know what they are doing. Here is further proof that they do not have a clue what they are doing in the so-called modernisation of the House—and further proof, too, that the Government want the House to be a rubber stamp.

Paragraph (4) refers to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 55, which deals with estimates, and states that the normal requirement of two days' notice is not needed at this stage in a Parliament. In fact, no notice is needed at all, and the point made earlier by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton is therefore relevant. Even two days' notice makes an informed debate about estimates almost impossible, so how much more stupid is the proposition facing us today? We are blithely asked—without advance notice, additional information or discussion—to rubber-stamp expenditure estimates of £149,381 billion and £144,305 billion, respectively. Sums so vast must cover a range of expenditure that all hon. Members would support, but the details are not available to the House and there is no chance for debate. Paragraph (4) simply makes worse the previous disgraceful actions in regard to estimates, as described by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton.

Paragraph (5) deals with the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill provisions. Again, large sums of money are involved.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The hon. Gentleman's argument might have had some credibility were it not for the motion passed by the previous Government and voted for by him, which was placed before the House on 12 March 1992. It set aside private Members' business, and stipulated that

> "Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion in the name of Mr. Francis Maude relating to Estimates".

The hon. Gentleman should have made his argument in 1992. He is wasting the House's time today.

Mr. Wilshire: It is extraordinary how long it took for that intervention to be made. I had moved on from that point, but the Government are so ill prepared for the debate that they have had to rummage in the files for something to say.

Mr. Forth: Does not my hon. Friend consider it intriguing that a so-called modernising Government

[Mr. Forth]

constantly pray in aid what the previous Conservative Government did to legitimise their actions? Is that not evidence of a degree of schizophrenia? Either the Government are modernisers and should reject most of what happened in the past, or they should honour what happened in the past and stick to it. They seem to want it both ways.

Mr. Wilshire: I agree absolutely. Certainly, I shall look at the *Hansard* record of this debate, and cut out and keep the interventions made by Government Members. From 8 June, those hon. Members will be sitting on the Opposition Benches, and their criticisms of today's debate will be quoted back to them.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Gentleman criticised me for not intervening on him earlier. He has been speaking since 5.14 pm. It is my view, as a democrat, that everyone should be given an opportunity to make their point. However, the hon. Gentleman has been rabbiting on for so long that I thought it time to intervene on him.

Mr. Wilshire: It was very kind of the hon. Gentleman: it gave me a chance to gather my wits about me and check my pages. However, the hon. Gentleman need not fret; this debate can go on until any hour, so I am not depriving him of an opportunity to speak for as long as he wishes if he has anything useful to say about the contempt with which the Government are treating the House.

Mr. Bercow: I am anxious that a hitherto unresolved question should be resolved. My hon. Friend has made a game and stoical effort at penetrating the inner recesses of the mind of the Leader of the House, yet the question still has not been answered. Did the right hon. Lady refrain from proposing the business motion tabled in her name out of a misguided deference to tradition, as is being suggested, or was it because, at the start of the debate, the necessary papers had not been smuggled into the Chamber? Can my hon. Friend answer this important question about the right hon. Lady's motivation for not moving the motion? Was it deference to tradition, was it a free choice, or was it an unavoidable necessity? I would like to know—I am inquisitive and I want an answer.

Mr. Wilshire: I am many things—a few of them good, lots of them bad—but I am not a mind reader. I am therefore unable to oblige my hon. Friend as to what was going on in the mind of the Leader of the House. I am perfectly happy to give way to her if she would like to explain to my hon. Friend something that I am unable to answer on her behalf.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not know why I am bothering, except that anything is better than listening to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). I can assure him and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that I had ample briefing material with me. In fairness, perhaps I should enlighten the House: although I said that there was no precedent for this motion being debated in the past 30 years, as far as I am aware there is no precedent, full stop. Only the records for the past 30 years have been checked. As far as I am aware, no Opposition have thought it a valuable use of their time to discuss how long we should discuss business that is of some concern to the people of this country at the winding-up of a Parliament.

The unworthy thought did cross my mind that such a shambles is the Opposition that they might decide to waste the time of the House in this way, as no Opposition before them have seen fit to do. I hoped that I was wrong, but I can assure Conservative Members that I was quite prepared to take part in a debate, was it necessary. On the whole, I concluded that it would not be to the benefit of the House and that it was better to leave the shambles in the hands of those who are so practised at creating it.

Mr. Wilshire: There we have it. The right hon. Lady began her intervention by saying that she did not know why she was bothering. That says everything that needs to be said about the Government's attitude to the House. Why bother? We are not even worthy, in the right hon. Lady's estimation, of an explanation.

The right hon. Lady says that this has never happened before. To that I would say, "Methinks I hear modernisation." She should be congratulating us on that, not complaining about it. I make no apology for having a sensible, considered debate about the matters in this motion which are of such importance to democracy in this Chamber.

Paragraph (5), which deals with the Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill, says much the same as paragraph (4). We will rush through the consolidation part of the Bill and not even bother, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said, to have a Second Reading. It gets worse. The paragraph says that notwithstanding the fact that these changes are to be made, Standing Order No. 56, which bans the moving of a committal motion, will apply. So not only do the Government want to get rid of Second Reading and not only do they want us to rubber-stamp the Bill: they want to stop us from committing it to a Committee which might consider it sensibly. That is how much they care.

Some of my colleagues—I forget exactly who—asked what would happen with Lords messages if, on the day, the debates were still continuing. I do not know why my hon. Friends get so excited because, even if we do receive some Lords messages, I have absolutely no doubt that debate on them will be banned by a guillotine motion.

We have before us the type of motion that the House should oppose. The Government have had plenty of time, and they still have time, but we are witnessing a Government who are leaving office exactly as they arrived. They arrived with contempt for Parliament and disdain for democracy. In four years, absolutely nothing has changed. One of their very last acts is once again to try to make a mockery of the House of Commons, of this Parliament, and of the democracy of this country, which has been struggled for for so long. The Minister's refusal even to bother to explain what the motion was about was yet another demonstration of the Government's wish for this Parliament to be a rubber stamp for whatever they want.

The Government's wish to stifle debate in the House should serve as an awful warning to the voters, because if we have another Labour Government we shall witness the completion of their project to turn this country into an elected dictatorship—a dictatorship that they can control at their whim, and in which the House has no part to play. It is a nightmare, and I hope that the electorate notice.

5.46 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): This has been an entertaining debate in which your tolerance has certainly been stretched, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will endeavour not to stretch it further. My remarks will be brief and specific and will relate to the matter that I referred to in an intervention much earlier.

I shall attach what I am about to say to paragraph (8) of the motion, which says:

> "At its rising on Friday 11th May, the House shall adjourn to Tuesday 15th May."

I shall briefly say why the House should not adjourn, but first I wish to respond to something that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said.

My hon. Friend referred to an earlier intervention about the work of the Modernisation Committee, and said that a future Conservative Government would remove the Modernisation Committee. I would concede that and agree with that only if the work currently carried out by the Modernisation Committee was transferred to the Procedure Committee, which I chair. The Procedure Committee would be very competent and very able to deal with those matters, and such a transfer would remove a Select Committee currently chaired by a very distinguished and, if I may say so, very traditional leading member of the present Labour Government. I admire much of what the right hon. Lady has done, but I believe that much of the Committee's work has now been done, and that the remainder of the work could be transferred to the Procedure Committee. The fact that that Committee is of course chaired by a Back-Bench Member of the House might give its recommendations more status.

Mrs. Browning: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Winterton: I am happy to give way to my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Browning: Of course I cannot make any commitment to my hon. Friend as to personalities who might be leading such Committees. I just wish to clarify for him that matters to do with changing the orders and procedures of the House are a matter for the House, not matters in relation to which the Executive should be controlling events.

Mr. Winterton *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps we can now get back to discussing the motion that is currently before us.

Mr. Winterton: I shall also briefly mention an intervention by the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), who spoke about the very inadequate way in which the House deals with estimates. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Procedure Committee has made recommendations as to how the House should deal with estimates. It has said that the House should devote more time to the granting of money to the Executive.

However, my very brief and specific remarks will relate to the matter that I raised earlier: the non-eligibility of the borough of Macclesfield for the additional Government assistance under the business rate relief scheme. I advance that case because the House should not adjourn until it has had the opportunity to discuss that matter. I speak not only for the borough of Macclesfield but for several other local authorities which hon. Members—I think they are both Opposition and Government Members—believe should be eligible under that scheme.

I shall be extremely brief. More than 90 per cent. of the geographical area of the borough of Macclesfield, which I have had the honour to represent for almost 30 years, is rural and agricultural. Only 2.3 per cent. of the working population of that huge area work in agriculture. So the area meets the population sparsity criteria, which is an important part of the business rate relief scheme.

Let me explain reason why I feel incensed and think it necessary to raise the issue in this debate. I have written to the Minister for Local Government and the Regions. I have written to and spoken to the Minister for the Environment, the chairman of the taskforce, with whom I have requested a meeting to discuss the matter because my borough has raised it with me. I believe that there should be a statement on the unfairness of the current position before Parliament is dissolved.

I make a plea to the Government, and hope that a reply may be forthcoming from the Leader of the House. As I have said, I have a quiet but deep respect for much of what the right hon. Lady has sought to do. I see that I am angering my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), but I have worked very closely with the right hon. Lady, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). I have done so throughout this Parliament, since she took over from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who chaired the Modernisation Committee at the beginning of this Parliament. I believe that the Leader of the House understands the seriousness of this matter to me and to those whom I represent. If she will assure me that I shall receive a sensible answer as to why Macclesfield is excluded, I shall not press my opposition.

Mrs. Beckett *rose—*

Mr. Winterton: Before I give way to the right hon. Lady, may I say that I am all the more incensed, and the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) will know this, because the hon. Gentleman's constituency, which is heavily urban and does not have the sparse population of my huge rural area, is eligible for assistance under the scheme. There is an inequity, and I believe that the right hon. Lady believes in justice.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has more than made his point, very forcefully.

Mr. Winterton: You have been extremely generous to me, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall be happy to give way to the Leader of the House, and I hope that she can give me an answer.

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman that he will receive an answer with which he will be content, but I can certainly undertake to ensure that he receives an answer.

Mr. Winterton: I simply ask the right hon. Lady to explain why Ellesmere Port and Neston, the City of Chester and perhaps Crewe and Nantwich, which has huge urban areas—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been given considerable latitude and, indeed, a reply to his request.

Mr. Winterton: You are indeed charming, Madam Deputy Speaker, and you have been extremely patient and very gracious. I have got my point across. May I say that I do not seek to abuse the rules and procedures of the House? Far be it from me, as Chairman of the Procedure Committee to do so, but all hon. Members, of whichever party, have a duty and responsibility to represent their constituents, which I have sought to do. I rest my case, but I hope that I receive an answer from whoever responds to the debate—and I shall be delighted if the Leader of the House does so.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 321, Noes 1.

Division No. 205] **[5.54 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce

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Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Mike Hall.

NOES

McCrea, Dr William

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Eric Forth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That—

(1) At the sitting on Friday 11th May, notwithstanding the provisions of the Order [23rd January] relating to Business of the House, Government business shall have precedence;

(2) At the sittings on Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, Government business may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour;

(3) At this day's sitting, Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, Standing Order No. 38 shall apply and the Order [7th November 2000] relating to Deferred divisions shall not apply if, after the time for the interruption of business, the opinion of the Speaker as to the decision on a question is challenged in respect of any question;

(4) At this day's sitting, the requirements of paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) shall be dispensed with in respect of the Motion relating to Estimates 2001–02;

(5) At this day's sitting, any Consolidated Fund (Appropriation) Bill ordered to be brought in and read the first time shall be proceeded with as if its Second Reading stood as an Order of the day, and Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills) shall apply;

(6) At this day's sitting, Thursday 10th and Friday 11th May, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any messages from the Lords shall have been received;

(7) At the sitting on Friday 11th May, the House shall not adjourn until the Speaker shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Act agreed upon by both Houses; and

(8) At its rising on Friday 11th May, the House shall adjourn to Tuesday 15th May.

Finance Bill Programme (No. 2)

6.8 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Finance Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 9th April:

Consideration and Third Reading

1. (1) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at today's sitting and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order.

(2) Any stage of the Bill may be proceeded with at the conclusion of the preceding stage, notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the interval between stages of a Bill brought in on Ways and Means resolutions.

Programming Committees

2. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Consideration of the Finance Bill in the Standing Committee has been completed: 106 clauses and 300 pages. I am glad to tell the House that the Bill was successfully reprinted overnight, and I am sure that all of us have read it avidly—indeed, those of us who are members of the Standing Committee think of nothing else but reading the Finance Bill.

On Report, we shall discuss new clauses—eight in total—one new schedule and three amendments, all tabled by Opposition parties. I hope that the House will agree to the motion so that we can turn to consideration of the matters that the Opposition want to debate.

6.9 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): In the tradition of the events that we have just witnessed, it would fall to me to speak for 43 minutes; however, I offer those present consolation by saying that I intend to speak for about 43 seconds. We want to move on to the substance of the debate. I should not like to resume my seat without offering the Paymaster General my condolences: if she really has been thinking of nothing but the Finance Bill—especially this Financial Bill—hers is a sad fate.

It is remarkable to be gathered here today having last spoken about the Bill at the tail end, as we thought, of our proceedings yesterday evening. I have no doubt that the items that we discuss today will be more interesting than many of those that it fell to the Standing Committee to discuss during the past couple of weeks.

6.10 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The Liberal Democrats have no problem with the programme motion. I should just like to say that it is a tribute to all three main parties that a smooth consensus operated between them during the proceedings of the Standing Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Finance Bill

As amended in the Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

APPLICATION OF DEFINITIONS OF PRIVATE RESIDENCES AND JOB–RELATED ACCOMMODATION

'Sections 222(1), (8) and (8A) of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 (which define private residence and job–related accommodation for the purposes of relief) shall be applied by the Inland Revenue in the exercise of all of its functions.'.—*[Mr. Letwin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.11 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause is short and simple. Its effect would be to render it necessary for the Inland Revenue to treat all second homes owned by those who, because of their occupation, live and are forced to live in tied accommodation as principal residences for the purposes of, among other things, the working families tax credit. I shall explain briefly why that is necessary.

For many years, the Inland Revenue has treated second homes as principal residences for the purposes of capital gains tax if those second homes are owned by people in the position that I have just described—held as investments or hedges, purchased by people who are forced by their occupation to live in tied accommodation. The rationale for that is clear and a matter of consensus between the political parties. If an individual buys a principal residence, he or she is exempt from capital gains tax on that residence. It is and always has been regarded as reasonable that the second home owned by an individual who is forced by his or her occupation to occupy tied accommodation—perhaps a tenant farmer or farm worker, a caretaker, a person who works for one of the utilities, or a carer—should be treated as exempt for capital gains purposes, as is the primary residence of other individuals.

Were that not the treatment for capital gains purposes, an inequity would have arisen. A farm worker, for example, who was forced to live in tied accommodation would be exposed to one of two serious risks. If he chose to avoid the capital gains problem by not buying a second home, when he left his job or retired, and if in the meantime house prices had, as has been the case cyclically for decades now, risen significantly, he would find himself in serious financial difficulty and might be unable to buy a home or to rent one at a reasonable price. If, on the other hand, while living in tied accommodation he chose to buy the second home but to encounter capital gains tax on selling it, he could find himself at a huge disadvantage compared to those who live permanently in a primary residence, sell that and move elsewhere, and who do not pay capital gains tax. On those grounds, and as a matter of consensus, the Inland Revenue has for many years treated second homes owned by such individuals as principal homes. That is the purpose of section 222 subsections (1), (8) and (8A) of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992.

6.15 pm

As I understand it—I am open to correction in narrating this history—when the Government introduced the working families tax credit as a substitute for family credit, the officials—I assume from the Department of Social Security—who handled family credit, or at least the rules and practices that guided those officials, transferred themselves to the Inland Revenue and began to administer the working families tax credit as part of the tax system, but according to principles that bore greater similarity to those that had applied in respect of family credit under the DSS. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) frequently alludes to a curious feature of our tax and social security systems, which is that our tax system largely treats individuals as individuals. It does not—or did not before the current Government took office—contain anything recognisable as a graduated means test, as opposed to thresholds of taxation. However, our social security system tends to look at families rather than individuals. It contains heavily graduated means-tested benefits—rather more, regrettably, under the current Government than hitherto. Above all, for the purpose of the current debate it contains a number of wealth tests, unknown in general to the tax system.

For example, I cite the famous case of a person who seeks to enter long-term care. That person will be funded fully by the Government only if his or her wealth is less than £18,000—I believe that that is the correct figure. It was, presumably, on that principle that family credit was never treated as exempt from a wealth test and it is, presumably, also on that principle that the working families tax credit is treated as it is.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's point serves his argument well. Let me try to assist him. The working families tax credit was indeed built on family credit, and the capital rules on family credit had been in place for 10 years under the previous Government. I do not think that the issue of capital gains tax serves as a peg on which to hang the debate. The question is whether one has a capital rule and, if so, where the ceiling should be set; not whether, because it lies within the tax system, something should follow capital gains. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that capital rules should be abolished, he must explain why the Conservative Government, in 10 years of presiding over family credit, did not take the opportunity to abolish the capital limits.

Mr. Letwin: The Paymaster General mistakes the character of my argument. I freely acknowledge that capital rules were in place for family credit, just as they are, rightly or wrongly, for other means-tested benefits. I am not accusing the Government of suddenly introducing those rules into the working families tax credit; nor is it our intention to suggest that the capital rules should be removed for the purposes of receiving that credit. I was merely sketching a history. As capital rules have been a feature of benefits rather than taxes, second homes have been treated as a piece of capital. If an individual who lives in tied accommodation obtains a second home, the Inland Revenue will treat him as having capital in that second home for the purposes of disqualification from working families tax credit, although he would be exempt from capital gains tax were he to sell it. That was also the case with family credit.

Dawn Primarolo: It will help the debate if we clarify the terms that we use when we refer to tied accommodation. What the hon. Gentleman calls the second home is not, in fact, the second home. I understand the issue that he raises and, clearly, capital gains tax does arise on a second home. Tax language is precise, and so must we be. I accept that it is not a question of removing capital gains on second homes. The Opposition are interested in whether there is a requirement to revise the interpretation of "household" in the working families tax credit, which recognises the existence of only one household—the place where people live. We should be clear on that.

Mr. Letwin: The Minister is right; she has not mistaken our argument. I am sorry if the term "second home" caused confusion. It is, literally, a second dwelling that is treated for capital gains tax purposes as a principal dwelling. We believe that if such a house is owned by someone who lives elsewhere in tied accommodation, it should be treated as a principal dwelling—the dwelling—for the purposes of the working families tax credit. We do not want it to be treated as a piece of capital that leads to disqualification from that credit.

I freely admit that we are not launching an attack on the Government. That would be dishonourable because they are merely continuing a practice that pertained in family credit. Our purpose is to spot a lacuna that it is now easy to cure because the Inland Revenue administers both measures. The definition is easily available from the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992, for the reasons that I identified—the records are in a single place and easily accessed. All we need is a simple change so that farm labourers and others who are in tied accommodation can obtain the working families tax credit to which their income would otherwise entitle them, notwithstanding the fact that they have purchased a house as a hedge against exposure to the property market because they live in tied accommodation. It appears that the Minister understands our concern. We wait to see whether she accepts the new clause.

I do not know whether the way in which we have drafted the new clause and the mechanism that we have used are appropriate. The Minister has at her disposal the vast resources of the Treasury Solicitor and parliamentary counsel. No doubt she can highlight deficiencies in the drafting and, perhaps, in the mechanics, but the principle is clear and right. I have constituents who are, and have always been, in work and whose income is zero. That might strike people who are not from rural areas as strange, but that is the case for many tenant farmers who find themselves at the bottom of the heap. They are precluded from receiving the working families tax credit by virtue of owning a house, which in many cases is modest, as a hedge against the fact that their tenancy forces them to be in tied accommodation. People in the countryside believe that to be unjust, which it clearly is. I hope that the Minister will tell us that, no matter which party is in power after the election, it will be a matter of political consensus to change the system by an appropriate mechanism.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Today we have seen the House at its worst and best.

[Mr. Edward Davey]

Time wasting and poor arguments in the debate on the business of the House motion were most unfortunate because that has prevented us from spending more time on this new clause.

I am persuaded by the arguments of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). I wondered what the new clause was trying to achieve because it was not obvious, but his remarks and the Minister's helpful interventions allow mere mortals to get our brains around it. He seems to have hit on an interesting issue. He made it clear that he was not trying to make a party political point, but trying to assist the Government in the operation of their policy. The argument is not just about the capital rules, but about a particular aspect of them; nor is it simply about social justice, but about labour mobility and the efficient operation of the labour market, especially as it applies to rural areas where most tied accommodation is to be found. We know how problematic and severe the difficulties are in many of those areas.

I doubt whether the Minister will accept the new clause. However, unless she has arguments to override the hon. Gentleman's case—I shall pay great attention to her comments—I hope that she will not dismiss the idea out of hand and that her response is in tone with the hon. Gentleman's remarks. We may well need to tackle the lacuna early in the next Parliament to ensure that there is social justice and efficiency in the operation of the labour market. This is a small but important issue.

Dawn Primarolo: I hope that I will be able to help the House and that the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) will accept my reasons for not being able to accept the new clause, which relates to people in tied accommodation. He mentioned tenant farmers, but there is a long list of people who also live in such accommodation. The issue involves property that they might hold for their retirement or when they move occupations, when it will become their main residence. He fully appreciates that if the property were rented out and an income generated, the working families tax credit would probably not be triggered because the income from the property might take the family's income beyond its limits.

6.30 pm

When the Government designed and implemented the working families tax credit, we used family credit as a building block for reasons of speed. The working families tax credit became operational in about 18 months and it has been a huge success in providing help to working families. I think that the hon. Member for West Dorset acknowledged that fact when he said that a group of people should be entitled to the credit even though they do not receive it at present because of the way in which the rules operate.

Neither during the design period of the working families tax credit nor during its operational period have we received representations that this issue might be a problem. Foot and mouth disease and the problems that it has caused in rural areas have probably put the spotlight on tenant farmers even though they are not the only people affected. Despite that fact, the issue is low key and it has hardly registered on our radar in terms of the number of representations that have been made. None the less, the hon. Gentleman has highlighted the problem of tenant farmers. If they lived in the other house, there would be no question about their ability to claim the working families tax credit provided that they received no other income that would take them over the limit.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The problem is not just foot and mouth, but that of declining farm incomes. Since the working families tax credit was introduced, I have been surprised to find in my constituency that many tenant farmers, who do not own other houses, rely on the credit to survive. Foot and mouth is not the immediate issue.

Dawn Primarolo: I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman is so appreciative of the credit. I will not descend to making a partisan comment—although I am sorely tempted to do so—because he makes a reasonable point about the issues involved.

I appreciate the comparison that the hon. Member for West Dorset made with capital gains tax, but the new clause will not necessarily produce the outcome that he seeks. It refers to all the functions covered by the Inland Revenue, and I cannot accept the mechanism that he suggests because there is a real risk that it could inadvertently change the application of the law in several other sectors. I am sure that he does not intend it to do that. For example, it could have implications when the Inland Revenue has to take a view on all sorts of tax issues relating to the status of a company, its shareholders, or employees when accommodation is provided. I am sure that he will accept that point.

The phrase in the new clause "all of its functions" worried me to such an extent that I had to ask one of my Revenue officials to return from a day's holiday to help us with this issue. It happens to be his birthday and I am sure that the House is extremely sorry to have deprived him of the opportunity to celebrate it with his children. [Hon. Members: "Oh dear."] Even Revenue officials are entitled to a day off occasionally.

The working families tax credit is governed by regulations, and regulations that come before the House are the appropriate means to implement such a change if the Government are persuaded that it is necessary. About 17,000 farmers and farm labourers already receive the working families tax credit, and it greatly assists them.

I hope that the hon. Member for West Dorset will take my word that the new clause does not provide the solution and that it would create problems elsewhere. Therefore, I hope that he will not press it to a Division. If he does, I regret that I will have to ask my hon. Friends to oppose it. I need to consider the principle in more detail as there are other complications. For example, tenant farmers are self-employed and the rent for land, which may be subject to a low rate, may be offset in their profits and losses.

This is not a huge issue. People are not knocking down the doors of the Treasury or the Inland Revenue or even writing to us about it. However, after the return of the House, I will be prepared to reconsider the matter and I undertake to speak to the hon. Gentleman about how we can deal with the problem. We shall certainly have corrected the problem by the time that integrated child credit takes over in 2003, but he is pressing me to act a little more quickly. I am willing to consider the issue in more detail and the secondary legislation route of regulations may be the best means of addressing the issue if the Government decide to act.

The hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot give him an absolute commitment, but I give him my word that I shall consider the issue closely and talk to him again, if necessary, about the details.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the Paymaster General for her reply. I take her point that a statutory change of type suggested by the new clause may have unintended consequences. I am delighted to hear that it may be possible to resolve the problem in regulations. Therefore, it appears that, whoever is in government, we shall be able to find a solution, and that fact will be widely welcomed.

The Paymaster General is right: she will not have received many letters on this subject. The representations that have been made to me and to other Members representing rural constituencies are almost the result of happenstance and of talking to individual constituents. As she and my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) suggested, the decline in farm incomes, which has been compounded by foot and mouth, has brought the issue to light. However, I regret to say that most of the people most affected are not in a condition to write letters to Ministers. That is why urgent action is needed. Regulations might be an appropriate way forward and I take the hon. Lady's word that she will consider their introduction. That is what we will do if we find ourselves in her shoes after the election. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 2

CHILDREN'S TAX CREDIT: CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OF AGE

'(1) After section 257AA(2) of the Taxes Act 1988 (which specifies the amount by reference to which the children's tax credit is calculated) insert—

> "(2AA) for a year of assessment during the whole or part of which is qualifying child under five years of age (or more than one) is resident with the claimant, subsection (2) above has effect as if the amount specified there were increased by £200."

(2) After subsection (3) of that section (reduction of amount where claimant has income within the higher rate band) insert;

> "(3AA) Where subsection (2AA) above applies, the reference in subsection (3) above to the amount specified in subsection (2) above is to the higher amount applicable by virtue of subsection (2AA) above.".

(3) After subsection (4) of that section (meaning of "qualifying child") insert:

> "(4AA) In this section 'qualifying child under five years of age', in relation to a year of assessment, means a qualifying child less than five years of age at the beginning of that tax year.".

(4) In section 257C(1) and (3) of the Taxes Act 1988 (indexation) for "257AA(2)" substitute "257AA(2) and (2A) and (2AA)".

(5) Schedule 13B to the Taxes Act 1988 (children's tax credit: Provisions applicable where child lives with more than one adult in a year of assessment) is amended in accordance with Schedule 11A to this Act.

(6) Subsections (1) to (3) and (5) above have effect for the year 2003–04 and subsequent years of assessment.

(7) Subsection (4) above has effect for the purposes of the application of section 257AA of the Taxes Act 1988 for the year 2004–05 and subsequent years of assessment.'.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss new schedule 1—*'Children's Tax Credit: Children under five years of age: supplementary—*

Introduction

1. Schedule 13B to the Taxes Act 1988 (children's tax credit: provisions applicable where child lives with more than one adult in a year of assessment) is amended as follows.

Child living with married or unmarried couple

2. After paragraph 3(2) (provisions applicable where neither partner has income above the basic rate limit entitlement where both partners claim in respect of a relevant child) insert—

> "(2AA) If a relevant child is a qualifying child under five years of age the reference in sub-paragraph (2)(b) above to the amount mentioned in section 257AA(2) is to the higher amount applicable by virtue of subsection (2A) of that section.".

Child living with more than one adult: other cases

3.—(1) Paragraph 6 (provisions applicable in case of child living with more than one adult) is amended as follows.

(2) After sub-paragraph (4) (apportionment of entitlement) insert—

> "(4AA) If the child is a qualifying child under five years of age the reference in sub-paragraph (4) above to the amount mentioned in section 257AA(2) is to the higher amount applicable by virtue of subsection (2A) of that section".

(3) After sub-paragraph (7) (claim by person with more than one allotted proportion) insert—

> "(7A) Where sub-paragraph (7) above applies in relation to a person, and any child in respect of which a proportion has been, or could have been, allotted to that person is a qualifying child under five years of age the reference in that sub-paragraph to the amount mentioned in section 257AA(2) is to the higher amount applicable by virtue of subsection (2A) of that section".

Combined cases

4. In paragraph 7 (provisions applicable where child lives with more than one couple or with one or more couples and one or more other adults), after sub-paragraph (2) insert—

> "(3) Where paragraph 6(4A) or (7A) above applies, the reference in sub-paragraph (2) above to the amount mentioned in section 257AA(2) is to the higher amount applicable by virtue of subsection (2A) of that section.".'.

Mr. Ottaway: The new clause would give any parent with a child under the age of five and who is entitled to the children's tax credit an extra £4 a week or £200 a year. It is no secret that that proposal forms part of the Conservative party's manifesto and we look forward to introducing such a measure in the Finance Bill that will be presented after the election. We moved the new clause because we feel that the Labour party's support for children is inadequate.

[Mr. Ottaway]

Earlier today, the Chancellor set out several pledges that he hopes to fulfil in the next Parliament. If he finds himself in that position, we wish him more success than he has had in fulfilling his pledges in this Parliament. One of his pledges was to halve child poverty; I must tell the House that he would make a good start in achieving that objective by accepting our new clause, which would go a long way towards reducing child poverty.

The Conservative party recognises the importance of the family as the basis of a free and ordered society and, in particular, believes that marriage plays an important role as the best environment in which to raise children. In general, children from two-parent families do better at school, have better chances in life and are less likely to end up ensnared in crime. Although the new clause focuses exclusively on the children's tax credit, which can be claimed regardless of someone's marital status, we submit that both matters are interrelated: I shall briefly dwell on that.

A future Conservative Government will reintroduce the married couples allowance, in addition to the children's tax credit, which is the subject of our debate. We will do so because the two allowances go hand-in-hand to promote the welfare of children.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us how much both those things will cost?

Mr. Ottaway: The introduction of the married couples allowance will cost about £1 billion and, as I shall spell out shortly, this particular proposal will cost £300 million. They make up part of the £8 billion worth of tax cuts that we have announced.

In his 1999 Budget, the Chancellor said:

> "we will replace the married couples allowance with a new family tax cut that will increase the amount that goes to help families with children. This children's tax credit will give more—not less—help to families at the time when they need it most—when they have their children and when their children are growing up."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 182.]

That is a laudable objective and a clear statement of policy. However, I submit that is an inadequate and failed policy; what the Chancellor promised has not happened. The children's tax credit does not replace the married couples allowance; nearly 5 million people who were entitled to the allowance are excluded from claiming the tax credit. People have to have children to claim children's tax credit, but many married couples do not have children.

Dawn Primarolo: Would the hon. Gentleman tell the House the exact conditions under which the Conservative party would reintroduce the married couples allowance? I thought that the allowance would be only for couples with children under 11. The Conservatives are not reintroducing the married couples allowance because, of course, lots of married couples have children over 11.

Mr. Ottaway: The Minister makes my point for me; the children's tax credit does not benefit married people, either—*[Interruption.]* I shall come to the Minister's point. There is no limit to the aspirations of the Conservative party. We have set out our aims and objective for 2003 to 2004. Unlike the Labour party, we generally believe that the concept of marriage is worth supporting and we will use our best endeavours to expand allowances wherever possible.

Dawn Primarolo: Does the hon. Gentleman believe in marriage so much that he believes that couples will be committed to it only if we pay them?

Mr. Ottaway: We believe in marriage, so the point of the policy is to encourage people to marry.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the fact that a couple is, or is not, married does not necessarily affect the stability of their relationship? In fact, a married couple could be in an unstable relationship and an unmarried couple could be in a stable relationship. Why the necessity to pay people to get married?

Mr. Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but research shows that children brought up by a married couple are more likely to do better at school and less likely to commit crime, as I said a few minutes ago.

The hon. Gentleman's party believes in family life, and family life is enshrined in marriage, which is why we support it. One should take a hard look at ministerial statements and, indeed, the 1997 Labour manifesto, which states:

> "We will uphold family life as the most secure means of bringing up our children. Families are the core of our society."

We believe that the concept of a married family is better than the concept of an unmarried family; that is the point of our policy.

6.45 pm

Mr. Hendrick: Clearly, stability is important in any relationship. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously telling us that, given the fact that his party is committed to £16 billion worth of cuts, it is prepared to pay £1.3 billion to encourage people to get married?

Mr. Ottaway: First, I do not know where the hon. Gentleman got his figure of £16 billion. There will actually be £8 billion worth of tax cuts. Like the Prime Minister, the hon. Gentleman can pluck artificial figures from the air. We have made it quite clear that we are committed to £8 billion worth of public expenditure cuts and, as a result, will be able to deliver £8 billion worth of tax cuts.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Miss Melanie Johnson): Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman with the exact source of the £16 billion. A Conservative press notice last July said that the Conservative party believed that the Government were overspending some £600 per head of population which, multiplied up, came to £16 billion. The Government did not produce that figure; the Conservative party itself released it.

Mr. Ottaway: The spin machine in Millbank has got to try a bit harder than that. In the long term, we hope to give substantially more than £8 billion worth of tax cuts to the British people; that is where the Economic

Secretary got that convoluted concept. Unlike the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, we are precise and accurate about what we intend to do. Before the last election, the Prime Minister said that he had no plans for any tax increases at all but, in this Parliament alone, we have had something like 45 tax increases. When it comes to accuracy, the Economic Secretary had better put her own house in order before she starts criticising our party.

As I said, the children's tax credit does not replace the married couples allowance; nearly 5 million people entitled to the MCA are excluded from claiming the CTC. I must tell the Paymaster General that I am raising that matter because the Chancellor said that the children's tax credit would replace the married couples allowance. Clearly, it does not and, as a result, millions are worse off. In truth, it is another Labour stealth tax.

The children's tax credit did not replace the married couples allowance; it was introduced a year after the MCA lapsed. As a result, everybody had to pay higher taxes—yet another Labour stealth tax. The children's tax credit is not available to higher rate taxpayers, as it tapers out quite quickly once the threshold is reached. That is another stealth tax and another breach of the Chancellor's pledge to eliminate means testing. It is quite remarkable that the Chancellor, who said at his party conference that he was pledged to eliminate means testing from the welfare system, has presided over the biggest increase in means-testing in recent history.

Fourthly, the credit discriminates against one-earner families. It contains a perverse anomaly that we raised during the Committee stage of the Finance Bill last year. A higher rate taxpayer earning £45,000 per annum will have lost all entitlement, yet a family with two earners on £30,000 each, making a household income of £60,000 a year, will get the credit. Thus, a family with £60,000 a year gets it, whereas a family with £45,000 a year does not. In the debate on the Finance Bill last year, the Government said that they would look into the anomaly, recognising the force of the Opposition's arguments, but they have taken no steps whatever to rectify the anomaly.

Miss Johnson: Would the hon. Gentleman remove the right to independent taxation, which is the basis of our present tax system and allows a man and a woman in the same household to be taxed independently? He is criticising a much-prized feature of our tax system.

Mr. Ottaway: I am not criticising that at all. Independent taxation was introduced by a Conservative Government, and we are proud of it. I was pointing out that the Government had made a pig's ear of the system as a result of their independent taxation. How anybody can design a credit which gives a benefit to the better off but not to the less well off is beyond me. I see that the Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond), is grinning at that proposition. I am happy to give way to him, but I see that he considers it appropriate to walk off, as he does not want to back up the Government's argument.

I come to my fifth point. Because of the Government's incompetence, there is likely to be a low take-up of the credit. The complexity of the forms to claim the children's tax credit is proving to be too great for many people. It is believed that there are about 2 million eligible families who have not applied for it. The figure comes from a written answer from the Treasury in February 2001. If Ministers want to bring the information up to date and tell us how many people are entitled to receive the credit but have not claimed it, I look forward to hearing from them.

Miss Johnson: I intended to deal with that later when I replied, but I shall update the figures now for the hon. Gentleman. Some 3.5 million forms have already been returned by people claiming children's tax credit. That represents more than 85 per cent. of the eligible PAYE population. Claims are still coming in and we expect a steady flow throughout the year. People who claim later will not lose out, as their CTC will be backdated to the start of the tax year. We are delighted that the take-up rate is so high. The February figures quoted by the hon. Gentleman predate the start of the financial year and of the new tax credit. That may well account for the discrepancy, but it is a pity that he has come to the House without getting the figures updated.

Mr. Ottaway: What a cheek for the Minister to tell us that hundreds of thousands of people entitled to claim the credit have not done so, and for her to claim that that is an achievement on the Government's part. It is a disgrace that hundreds of thousands of people are entitled to the credit but have not applied. It ill behoves the Minister to take that attitude.

Mr. Hendrick: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He says that it is a disgrace that hundreds of thousands have not claimed CTC, yet his party criticises the Government for using publicity to the extent that they have.

Mr. Ottaway: The reason why so many people have not claimed the credit is that the application forms are complex and hard to understand. That is why a simplified system under a future Conservative Government will be welcomed by all, particularly the hundreds of thousands of people who are entitled to claim but have not done so.

Mr. Bennett: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and it is nice to witness his conversion to concern for the under-fives and their families. Can he explain why, for the 18 years of the previous Conservative Government, no attempt was made to use the child benefit provisions to pay different rates to children of different age groups?

Mr. Ottaway: We gave the married couples allowance, which was a universal benefit. *[Interruption.]* We did not eliminate it. It was there—

Miss Johnson *rose—*

Mr. Ottaway: I have not given way to the hon. Lady. I am answering the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett).

Mr. Bennett: We are not discussing the married couples allowance. We are dealing with a special benefit for families with children under five. I want to know why the Conservatives did not have that interest between 1979 and the last election. If they were so concerned, why did they not introduce a provision under the child benefit

[Mr. Bennett]

regulations that allowed them to pay a higher rate to particular age groups of children? Why the conversion now? Is it because they are in opposition?

Mr. Ottaway: It is because the Conservative party is prepared to look to the future. We do not intend to dwell on the past and drag out old recriminations about why we did not do this or that, or whether amendments were tabled to previous Finance Bills to provide extra benefits for the under-fives—maybe yes, maybe no. We are looking to the future. The new Conservative party is prepared to go forward on proposals such as those contained in the new clause. We recognise that the under-fives are a group of children who need special help. We are targeting the under-fives because we believe that they are most entitled to the benefit.

Miss Johnson: Can the hon. Gentleman explain to me and my hon. Friends why child benefit was frozen for a period and was not increased over the term of the previous Government as it has been by this Government, who have put record increases into child benefit? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the previous Government cut the value of the married couples allowance?

Mr. Ottaway: Yes, I confirm that the previous Government cut the value of the married couples allowance.

Our argument is that the children's tax credit has not been designed as well as it could have been. It should be a simpler and a fairer structure. As it is currently designed, the tax credit is a duplication. As the Minister knows, the 10 per cent. band covers the first £1,500 of taxable income. The CTC merely duplicates the relief that would be available at 10 per cent., which is not available to those who are entitled to CTC. Indeed, when the working families tax credit is taken into account, the children's tax credit is a triplication. The credit does not give parents with younger children the level of support that they need and deserve. A discriminating, inadequate, poorly thought out measure incompetently introduced is not the way to support the nation's children.

The next Conservative Government will increase the children's tax credit for parents with children under the age of five by £200 per annum by 2003–04. We will devote £300 million of our £8 billion capacity for tax cuts to reducing the income tax payable by parents with a child under the age of five. That, coupled with our pledges to restore the married couples allowance, to simplify the system, and to arrest the advance of means-testing with all its complexity, means that only the Conservative party recognises the problems of the family and is prepared to do something about them.

Mr. Bennett: If it is so important to help the family, why should families have to wait so long for help?

Mr. Ottaway: We have made it clear that we intend to phase the help in over the first three years of the next Parliament. The hon. Gentleman and the Minister know that we have accepted the Government's spending plans and tax plans for the first year of the next Parliament. We will introduce tax cuts and achieve reductions in public expenditure in years two and three. The figure that I mentioned is for 2003-04.

Dawn Primarolo: Did I hear the hon. Gentleman correctly? Did he confirm that if by some disaster his party were elected at the general election it would be committed to spending cuts and tax cuts, and it would expect the electorate to believe that everything would remain the same?

7 pm

Mr. Ottaway: The Paymaster General makes it seem like I have revealed some secret. We have made it perfectly clear in countless press conferences that by 2003-04 we will have reduced public expenditure by £8 billion on the figure announced in the Red Book and in the comprehensive spending review last November. That is well-documented. It is our policy, and the hon. Lady knows what public expenditure we are committed to maintaining and where our adjustments will be made.

Mr. Hendrick: The Conservative party is willing to pay £1.6 billion to entice people into getting married. If those people decided to divorce, would it be willing to claw back all the benefits they received when they were married to prove that it was not a marriage of convenience?

Mr. Ottaway: I am not quite sure what point the hon. Gentleman is making. If people were to divorce, they would not be entitled to the married couples allowance, because they would no longer be married.

Mr. Hendrick: The Conservatives would spend £1.6 billion of taxpayers' money to give people an incentive to get married. If they decided to get divorced a few years later, would the Conservative party claw back that extra benefit to prove that it was not a marriage of convenience?

Mr. Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman is getting his figures in a twist. We are not proposing to spend £1.6 billion on the married couples allowance: the figure is £1 billion. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's point about clawing back the benefit is lost on me. Perhaps he would write to me about it, and I will give him an answer.

Dr. William McCrea (South Antrim): Is not it strange to talk about £1.6 billion or £1 billion to encourage people to get married? Labour Members seem to be sneering at the basic morality of marriage. Why should we sneer about the fact that people get married?

Mr. Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman is on to something. For the past 20 minutes, there has been nothing but criticism and sneering at the concept of marriage. I should like mildly to correct the hon. Gentleman on one point. Our proposal is not a reward for marriage: it is a recognition of marriage. The Conservative party believes in marriage, whereas it is becoming manifestly clear that the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) does not.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ottaway: This is a guillotined debate, and I have given way three or four times, so I shall not give way again.

Families have suffered a systematic increase in taxation over the past four years. How does it help our children if their parents are taxed up to the hilt? If people smoke, drink, drive a car, have a pension or are married, they have been subjected to 45 increases in taxation during this Parliament. Such regressive taxes hit those on lowest incomes hardest—the people in Labour's heartlands. The average family pays more than £600 a year more tax under Labour. The Conservative party will reverse the trend. We will take 1 million pensioners out of taxation. We will make income from savings tax free for millions. That is the way to help our children.

The Conservative party is in tune with the British public. We will reduce taxation and will liberate the nation's creativity.

Mr. Edward Davey: There may be a germ of a good idea in this new clause. The serious, wider policy debate is about the best way of providing support for families and children, whether couples are married or unmarried. The Government are gradually moving towards a coherent approach, and they may get there by hook or by crook. At the moment, the system is highly complicated, with child benefit, child care tax credit, working families tax credit and children's tax credits. Previously, we had the married couples allowance, which was available whether couples were married or not.

This is a complex area, and the Finance Bill adds to that complexity by introducing the babies tax credit, which is available to families with children under the age of 1. Having created some of that complexity to meet their laudable objective of reducing child poverty, the Government are now trying to tidy things up. The Chancellor is working towards an integrated children's credit. As the Government move towards a more rational, streamlined approach to ensure that families have the resources they need to tackle child poverty, the question is whether it is a good idea to include families with children under the age of 5 in the proposals for an integrated children's credit.

Mr. Bennett: Do the Liberal Democrats think that it is a good idea? My impression from listening to the arguments about child benefit was that, although one could identify loss of earnings as a problem for families with very small children, after the first year small children do not cost families anything like as much as young teenagers.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful for that intervention, because I was just about to explain my party's position on this issue and the thinking behind it. We have some sympathy with the idea of rewarding families with children under the age of 5. That could be achieved through a premium on child benefit or through the mechanism in the new clause. The hon. Gentleman is right that children cost more in their first year. The Government were right to acknowledge that, although we believe that they could have gone about it differently—for example, through a maternity grant. Many of the costs in the first year are up-front and not spread through the year, as the proposal for a babies tax credit suggests.

We understand that argument, but I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that there are not just costs but benefits in ensuring that a family has more money in those early years. It would give parents a real choice between staying at home to look after their children or going to work.

The Government have continually tried to give the impression that they want new mothers to go back to work as soon as possible: that has been part of the rhetoric and, indeed, part of the Government's tax and benefits strategy. I fear that they may have gone too far in advocating an early return to work for new mothers, and it is in that context that I see the germ of a good idea in new clause 2.

It may well be—and I believe some sociological studies suggest—that it is beneficial to young children for their parents to have more contact with them in their earlier years, before they go off to nursery school, playschool or primary school. There is a serious policy question to be asked: should the tax and benefits system make it easier for parents to remain at home during those first five years?

I hope that, in response to today's debate and as they proceed with the debate on integrated children's credit over the next year or two—I say that assuming that Labour will be returned to office—the Government will consider the issue in some depth. The commissioning of research, and a wider public debate, may be required to establish whether it makes sense—in terms of effects on the labour market, and in terms of effects on the welfare of families and children—to ensure that the money that we are putting aside is targeted at the early years.

In many ways, the whole debate is about where resources should be targeted. One of the aims of the children's tax credit was to augment the funds going to families, without augmenting only a universal benefit—child benefit. The Government considered taxing child benefit, as the Conservatives had done before them, but for various reasons they decided against it, and ended up with the children's tax credit. Again, they were trying to find the best way of targeting resources more effectively.

The new clause raises the important question of whether we should target resources at children during those early years. I think that there is a strong argument for doing so, but I should like the Government to commission further research, and I think that we should engage in a wider public debate. Only when we see the results of research will we know the facts. Perhaps we should target even more resources at families with children under five than the new clause suggests; perhaps we should be much more ambitious. That might be the quickest, most tax-efficient and most expenditure-efficient way of meeting the Chancellor's objective of halving child poverty in 10 years.

As I have said, there is a serious issue behind new clause 2. I hope that, rather than taking the partisan, political point-scoring route down which the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) seemed to be tempting Ministers, the Government will address themselves to what I consider to be the really serious policy issue.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Let me begin by responding to the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). I think it useful for our policies to be based on evidence; indeed, work continues in the Treasury in an attempt to ensure that they reflect the real needs of society, in terms of child poverty, as much as is possible at any one time.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) did not take into account the Government's introduction of a number of measures reflecting the extra costs incurred by the parent of a child under five. One way of

[Miss Melanie Johnson]

structuring such measures is to take account of the cost of children over a lifetime—which has been done, in that there is £5 more child benefit for the first child, throughout its lifetime, than there is for second and subsequent children.

7.15 pm

Mr. Ottaway: Does the Minister think that she is doing enough? Does she not think that more could be done for the under-fives?

Miss Johnson: I intend to deal with that in much more detail. Let me say initially, however, that we have reduced the number of children in poverty by 1.2 million during the life of the current Parliament. That includes many children under five, as it includes many over five, and it represents a substantial improvement.

The increase in maternity pay from £60.20 to £100, the extension of paid maternity leave from 18 to 26 weeks and the introduction of two weeks' paternity leave in 2003 will help the parents of under-fives. As the ex-parent, as it were, of three under-fives, including twins, I speak with personal experience of the substantial needs of those with young children in the house, in terms of both income and time.

Mr. Davey: The Minister—who, I am sure, is not an ex-parent—mentioned maternity and paternity leave. Have the Government considered parental leave? Some countries give parents leave that they can take later in their children's lives, which is often limited to the first five years. That provides greater flexibility: it can be used, for example, when a child is ill.

Miss Johnson: The idea has been suggested in a number of quarters, and is being discussed. Consultation is taking place. As I said at the outset, we are keen to give the best possible support to families with children in general, but to those with children under five in particular.

The Opposition seem to want to increase children's tax credit by £200. Lest, by any quirk of fate, the Opposition might be in charge of a Finance Bill after a general election—unlikely as that may seem now—I should point out that, as drafted, the new clause would reduce it by £20. As the sum in question is 10 per cent. of an allowance, the figure should be £2,000.

The Government will, in fact, increase children's tax credit by a further £520 in the year of the child's birth, and will do so from 2002 rather than 2003—which is what I understand the hon. Gentleman to propose, assuming that he is thinking in terms of £200 rather than £20. What we are already doing is far better than what the Opposition suggest. It is more, it is earlier, and it focuses resources on the time when parents are most in need.

Mr. Ottaway: The Minister is right: we intend the amount to be increased by £200. We have taken into account the increases in the pipeline, and this is over and above those increases.

Miss Johnson: Is it over and above the introduction of babies credit?

Mr. Ottaway: Yes.

Miss Johnson: That is interesting. I thank the hon. Gentleman. I will come to the £16 billion later.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton has urged other courses on me, but I cannot resist returning to some of the slightly wider political issues, on which we have been much tempted by the hon. Member for Croydon, South. First, I turn to the married couples allowance, on which he spent considerable time.

The so-called reintroduction of the married couples allowance is probably a complete misnomer. For the Conservatives to say that the new clause would reintroduce the married couples allowance involves considerable spin. It would do nothing of the sort. It is a proposal for married couples to transfer their personal allowance between themselves. It does not benefit many married couples, or indeed many families with children. Eight out of 10 married couples would gain absolutely nothing from the proposal; eight out of 10 families with children would gain nothing from it. For example, single parents and married couples who were both in work would gain nothing, despite the fact that the hon. Gentleman claimed he supported marriage and that the proposal was partly about that. Married couples with secondary school-aged children would gain nothing from it because of the cut-off at the age 11. I do not know what Conservative party policy is on helping children and families out of poverty where the children are aged over 11, because the new clause does not address their needs.

This Government have been committed to helping families with children and have introduced the working families tax credit and the children's tax credit, and those policies will lift 1.2 million children out of poverty.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that Conservative Members have never explained why they did nothing about this matter throughout all their years in government? The House debated the cost of children in 1976, when Baroness Castle introduced the child benefit legislation. The then Conservative Opposition said that they would like to do more for children in families, yet they did nothing for 18 years.

Miss Johnson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's recollection of a time when I was not an hon. Member, but I do remember that nothing was done. In proposing the new clause, the hon. Member for Croydon, South did nothing to answer questions that my hon. Friend, I and other Labour Members put to him about why these issues, by which he apparently sets so much store now, were not addressed over those 18 years, when there was ample opportunity to do so.

Mr. Flight: May I make two points? First, the proposal for married couples is additional to existing provision, so it is not a debate about taking something back, or whether to have A or B. Secondly, it is specifically targeted at married couples with children under 11, partly to offset some of the bias against mothers, or fathers for that matter, who wish to stay at home to look after children. In particular, it is designed to give mothers a little more flexibility. We can debate what was done in the past, but the Minister is wrong to seek to cast the proposal in a negative light. She may disagree with it, but it is specifically tailored to meet the needs of a group of people who wish to stay at home a little longer to look after their children while they are younger.

Miss Johnson: Yes, but that is exactly why I said that calling it a reintroduction of the married couples allowance was a very spun description. The hon. Gentleman accepts that it is a targeted measure and that it does not help many who are married, or, indeed, many who have children. As I said, eight out of 10 married couples and eight out of 10 families with children will gain nothing. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Croydon, South is burbling some further remark from a sedentary position. I did not catch exactly what it was and he may want to intervene again, but may I remind him that it is this Government who have increased child benefit to £15.50 a week for the first child and £10.35 a week for subsequent children? That is a 26 per cent. real-terms increase over the life of this Parliament.

People will have to judge for themselves—they are getting the opportunity not only to make that judgment, but to act upon it—whether our record of increasing child benefit by record amounts stands up against the record of the Conservative Government, who promised tax cuts and hiked tax up, who promised to help people but put 3 million on the dole and who froze child benefit; they did not increase child benefit in line even with inflation at various periods. I am proud to stand in support of what the Government have done. Our record speaks for itself.

Mr. Ottaway: I presume that the Minister is advancing an argument against the new clause. She has to say why she does not believe that more can be done for families, and why £200 a year, or £4 a week, would not help children, rather than going on about the past.

Miss Johnson: I have already said why I believe that it is better to take the action that we are taking through the various measures that we have introduced, which support families, and why increasing support for children in their first year of life, which we have just introduced, is a valuable support.

Mr. Hendrick: Given that the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) has accepted that no such comparable measures were introduced in 18 years of Conservative government and that we should look forward to "a new Conservative Government", will my hon. Friend be willing to invite him to intervene in order for him to apologise for that omission over 18 years?

Miss Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his suggestion. I would be happy to take him up on it, but I appreciate, as he will, that the hon. Member for Croydon, South is well aware of the invitation that has just been extended to him and is not leaping to his feet. I think that we will all draw our own conclusions from that.

The introduction of a new children's tax credit at £10 per week from April is worth £520 a year—more than twice the value of the married couples allowance that it replaces. From next April, the children's tax credit will be raised to £20 a week in the year of a child's birth, which will in effect double the allowance in the first year of a child's life.

I was much amused by the remarks of the hon. Member for Croydon, South on the form that is required. It is easy to allege that forms are complicated, but that was an absolute load of nonsense. The form was thoroughly tested with the help of 1,000 volunteer taxpayers—indeed, I am told that the forms that the Inland Revenue has received have been completed to a very high standard—and it asks for the most basic information, such as the name, the date of birth of the child and the partner's national insurance number. It does not ask claimants to detail their income or to provide complicated details.

7.30 pm

Many people have completed the forms quite satisfactorily. As I said, 3.5 million claims have been made, encompassing 85 per cent. of the eligible PAYE population. The hon. Member for Croydon, South probably does not want me to remind him of the fact that, despite years of work in trying to improve take-up, family credit had a much lower take-up rate than the children's tax credit has had.

The Government would like take-up to be even higher. As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said when commenting on publicity, the Government will do everything that we can to ensure that those who, for one reason or another, are not aware of the credit or have not yet claimed it do so. We are working on that, and the forms are continuing to come in.

Mr. Ottaway: The Minister makes it sound as though complaints about the form's complexity are being made only by the Opposition. I was quoting the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, which presumably knows what it is talking about. It said that the application

> "form is very complex. For those not used to filling in tax forms, the task may prove to be too arduous and some will lose out on an allowance altogether."

Miss Johnson: I am completely mystified by that statement, but I am sure that we could quite quickly find the hon. Gentleman a copy of the form. The details required could not be simpler or more basic, and it is unlikely that, in supplying them, taxpayers would have to do other than perhaps look up their national insurance number if they did not know it.

Mr. Flight: The Minister made a similar point when I spoke about this issue in a previous debate. I think that the form that is being referred to—I remember receiving one myself—is the one sent out a year earlier to determine whether people would qualify for the credit. That form went to the heart of the problem about how much each partner earned and whether they would be ineligible for the credit because one partner was earning too much. It was extremely difficult to complete, and if one did not complete it correctly one did not receive the instant form. Half a million people, including several of my constituents, never got round to submitting their claim promptly in April because they had not completed the previous pre-qualification form.

Miss Johnson: As I said, 85 per cent. of the eligible PAYE population have satisfactorily sent in their forms, we have had a very high response rate, and the forms are still coming in. The hon. Gentleman may be referring to another form, but the fact is that anyone claiming the children's tax credit has only to supply some very basic information. The tax office will take that information, assess the tax credit and make it available to claimants as a tax cut in their pay packet.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South made the remarkable allegation that the Government have shown a lack of support in addressing the issue of child poverty.

[Miss Johnson]

I simply remind him that the previous Conservative Government not only cut the married couples allowance, but froze child benefit and increased taxes.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South also talked about the £8 billion worth of "adjustments", which seems to be more Conservative spin for cuts, that a future Conservative Government would make to our spending plans. We do not accept the £8 billion figure simply because we are working from the figures given by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) in a press notice that he issued last summer. The notice described a cuts guarantee of £16 billion, which would entail a £25 million public expenditure reduction for every constituency in the country, massively hitting schools, hospitals and other services.

Mr. Edward Davey: I am intervening to try to be helpful to the Minister. The mass unemployment of the 1980s over which the then Conservative Government presided caused the greatest damage to the fight against child poverty. If the Government have achieved only one thing by adopting the Liberal Democrats' policy of an independent central bank, thus ensuring stable economic growth, it has been to reduce unemployment by 1 million. That has constituted the Government's most effective attack on child poverty. I therefore congratulate them on being sensible enough to adopt Liberal Democrat policies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Minister responds to that, I point out that there is a grave danger of this debate developing into a general economics debate. Will the Minister and all other hon. Members please focus on new clause 2?

Miss Johnson: I shall certainly do my best to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I believe that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton has made a valuable point about the Government's contribution in getting people into work and making work pay. Both of those achievements have made very valuable contributions. I am puzzled by Liberal Democrat Members' lack of support for the new deal, which has certainly played a crucial role in cutting unemployment and addressing the issue of child poverty.

I should like finally to outline the Government's record on those issues. Families with children will be on average £1,000 a year better off from all the measures introduced in this Parliament. A family with two children now faces the lowest tax burden since 1972. A single-earner family on average earnings of £25,000 a year with two young children will be £520 a year better off, and a single-earner family on half average earnings of £12,700 a year with two young children will be £3,000 a year better off. A family on income support with two young children will be £1,670 a year better off.

We have addressed the issue of child poverty in all those ways. We have also, as I said, focused some of those resources specifically on under-fives. We must not forget what we have done to address the issue, including introducing the working families tax credit—which, on average, compared with the previous family credit system, is worth £35 a week more. By such measures, we have succeeded in lifting 1.2 million children out of poverty.

The policies being advocated by the hon. Member for Croydon, South are set within the context of an absence of a fiscal framework and fiscal rules. He does not answer the question of where the spending cuts that are necessary to fund tax cuts will fall or address the issue of continuing economic stability. We are able to support families and children because of economic stability and the fact that we have so many more people in work and have cut unemployment to its lowest levels for many years.

I therefore urge the House to reject new clause 2.

Mr. Ottaway: In her final remarks, the Minister said that new clause 2 was set outside any framework and any rules, but it is set within the context of the Government's own framework and rules. As I said at the beginning of the debate, the new clause is part of an £8 billion tax reduction package. There has been much childish merriment among Labour Members about the nature of that £8 billion, but I make it clear that the Government's plans as outlined in the Red Book are to increase public expenditure by £72 billion by 2003–04. A future Conservative Government would increase spending by £64 billion by 2003–04, thereby creating the £8 billion difference.

To prevent the Minister from continually repeating the mistaken figure of £16 billion over the next four weeks, after the debate I shall give her the precise figures supporting the £8 billion figure. That is what we stand on, and that is what we intend to do. There is no need for her to repeat the figure of £16 billion again, because that figure is wrong.

The most important thing that has happened today is that the Minister has singularly failed to say why this proposal, designed to help the children most in need of assistance, the under-fives, should not be accepted. She says that she stands on her record, and that the Government are doing what they can to help that group of children. That is complacent, inadequate and unacceptable. If we were not working to a timetable motion I would seek to divide the House, but time is short and there are other new clauses to be debated. I therefore beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 3

Exemption from Capital Gains Tax

'—. In section 271(1) of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 (concerning exemption from CGT) after subsection (j) insert—

> "(k) any gain accruing to a UK resident company, or to a non-resident company chargeable to UK corporation tax under section 10 of this Act, in respect of the disposal of a substantial shareholding in a trading company or a member of a trading group. For the purposes of this subsection a substantial shareholding is a shareholding of 20% or more held for a period of a year or more.".'.—*[Mr. Flight.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Flight: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we may take new clause 4—*Substantial shareholdings: deferral of capital gains tax*—

'.—In section 155 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992 (concerning classes of assets for roll-over relief) Class 9, after Head B, insert new subsection.

"CLASS 9

Substantial shareholdings in trading companies or members of a trading group. For the purposes of this section, a substantial shareholding is a shareholding of 20 per cent. or more held for a period of a year or more.".'.

Mr. Flight: The two new clauses would provide alternative measures to complete the correction of the major mistake in the Government's original Budget proposals last year. The House will remember that the Chancellor came to the House with proposals to tax the offshore mixing companies used by multinationals based in Britain.

The original proposals would have made Britain one of the most unattractive places for multinationals to be based, whereas it has been, after Holland and the United States, one of the most attractive. They would have led, in due course, to companies setting up elsewhere and moving abroad, causing jobs and tax revenue to be lost.

Fortunately, after many—not only the Opposition but businesses and accountants—had spoken out against the proposals, the Government were forced to accept the objections and change their proposals. Last year's Finance Act corrected the error by introducing the practical and sensible arrangements for onshore pooling.

Dawn Primarolo: Did the hon. Gentleman agree with the mechanism of offshore pooling and the mixer companies that were used as holding companies to avoid tax in this country?

Mr. Flight: The Paymaster General is well aware that international businesses have been in discussion with the Inland Revenue for more than a year—quite sensibly, if that is what they thought they had achieved—to bring about onshore pooling arrangements, because they did not like having to use offshore mixers to achieve fair tax rates on their international earnings.

It was the need for onshore pooling arrangements, which did not then exist, that led to the use of offshore mixers. That usage was established, and well known by the Revenue. It was a pity that when the issue was moving towards being satisfactorily resolved, the original Budget proposals did not pick up on that, but tried to be clever. Fortunately, the Government were eventually persuaded to see the light and change their line.

Dawn Primarolo: That was not the question that I asked the hon. Gentleman; I asked whether he was in favour of the use of mixer companies for offshore pooling. His party was in power for 18 years, and did nothing about it. Which does he favour: offshore mixing, which his Government presided over, or onshore mixing, which this Government have introduced?

Mr. Flight: The Paymaster General, who has played her role in this Government extremely competently, must surely accept that they have now been in power for four years, that we are coming up to another general election, and that what happened in the past is out of date. My answer is that probably, provided that the Government accept new clause 3 or 4, onshore pooling in its entirety is more desirable, because it is overt and within the control of the UK Government and tax authorities.

7.45 pm

The question of how to deal with the tax position of multinational companies has emerged over the years. There were far fewer multinational companies 20 years ago, and the idea of Britain being an important base for multinational companies has developed dramatically over the past 10 or 20 years.

Dawn Primarolo *rose*—

Mr. Flight: If the hon. Lady is going to ask me why the Conservative Government did not introduce onshore pooling as an alternative to offshore mixers, my answer is that first, I personally was not a Member of the House at that time, and secondly, that we are now dealing with the present, not the past.

Dawn Primarolo: I entirely accept that Opposition Members were not brought up, as I was, to believe that we are all responsible for our past as well as for our present—*[Interruption.]* I am perfectly prepared to say that; it would appear that my past is scrutinised quite a lot by hon. Gentlemen.

The hon. Gentleman has made the Government's point for us, because he has just said that in more than 18 years, the previous Government failed to see or act on the development of the new economy, and so did nothing about offshore pooling, which became an ever increasing problem. They did nothing about deferral or exemption, either. Perhaps he will tell us why.

Mr. Flight: The Paymaster General is being unnecessarily and rather ineffectively aggressive, in comparison with her normal behaviour. The issue is simple. The practice of using offshore mixers developed with the knowledge—indeed, to some extent with the collaboration—of the Inland Revenue over the past 10 years or so. However, its time had come; it was time to make a change and bring the arrangements onshore.

The fruits of the offshore mixers were beneficial to the United Kingdom, because they enabled us to collar much of the multinational capital business. They therefore acted in the national interest. However, the time had come to move the activity onshore. The two new clauses would complete that process fairly, and along the lines that, as I am sure the Paymaster General would be forced to agree, the Government undertook to follow during the debates on the Finance Bill last year.

Indeed, the hon. Lady herself has admitted that the Government have been consulting on the issue that the two new clauses address almost since that Finance Bill became the Finance Act last summer. I repeat that if they wish to achieve both fairness and a continuing competitive environment for multinational holding companies in the UK, the Government need choose only one of the two new clauses. The provisions are needed because holding companies will have to reshape themselves into a flatter structure than has typically prevailed under the old offshore mixer arrangements.

[Mr. Flight]

They will be moving from what was in effect a double tax relief regime to the new onshore pooling arrangements, under which the relevant holding company in the UK will be required to hold the international subsidiaries directly. New clause 3 would provide the route of exemption from capital gains tax when such a UK-based holding company reorganises its subsidiaries. In essence, it would make what had been a subsidiary of a subsidiary a direct subsidiary of the holding company. That probably represents the simplest and fairest solution to the problem, but we have also put forward an alternative in new clause 4, which would provide roll-over relief.

The amelioration of the tax position resulting from the Government's required restructuring from offshore to onshore pooling was promised by the Government as part of their package on double tax relief and controlled foreign companies. The Paymaster General herself has advised that the Government continue to consult on the matter. I suggest that it is now time to act, because the Government have had a year to consult on that important technical matter in the national interest. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) raised the issue in discussing clause 79 in Committee and she, while not promising to act, said:

> "The Government are consulting on changes to the tax on gains made by companies and disposals of substantial share holdings with a view to introducing either a deferral or an exemption."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 8 May 2001; c. 160.]

The new clauses modestly request that the Paymaster General make a decision and tidy up the loose ends in the national interest and to complete the new arrangements for multinationals. If she chooses not to accept either new clause, I hope that she will give a firm undertaking that the issue will be addressed. A year's consultation is surely sufficient.

Dawn Primarolo: I am afraid that I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman. It will not surprise him to learn that should he press his new clauses to a Division, I shall ask my hon. Friends to oppose them. In all truth, he knows why that is a reasonable position in what is a complex area of taxation. I am sure that he will also accept that the Government, having set such a splendid record in the past four years in consultation on, and reform of, those complex areas, are aware that the question of whether deferral or exemption should be used is of considerable interest to business. We must ensure that our proposals are relevant to businesses today and will stand the test of time in a competitive and important sector of the economy.

I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman that his Government failed to address any of the issues before us. Organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry pressed for changes to be considered, but the previous Government failed to act. I understand their reluctance to act on a highly complicated area of taxation, but it is simply not true that this Government have failed to deal with the issue. Nor was it reasonable to expect that the Government should deal with it at the same time as the changes to double taxation relief. The hon. Gentleman was a member of the Finance Bill Committee last year as he was this, and he will know well that the double taxation relief changes were enormously complex and challenging, not only for Inland Revenue officials and businesses advising them, but for Members of Parliament. I cannot accept that at the same time as dealing with that highly complex legislation, we should have discussed a pick-and-mix choice between deferral and exemption.

Matters have moved on, to the considerable benefit of business, since the two issues of double taxation and deferral were linked in May 2000. In June 2000, the Government announced the double taxation rules allowing the onshore pooling that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The pre-Budget report raised the possibility of an exemption as an alternative to a deferral of capital gains tax on the disposal of substantial share holdings. Businesses are very interested in that alternative, but they wish to see more work done on it.

The Government have made it clear, as I said on Second Reading, that we will introduce the changes in the 2002 Finance Bill. That is not that long to wait.

Mr. Flight: On a technical matter, will that timetable of dealing with the outstanding issue in the 2002 Finance Bill fit with the period required for restructuring to onshore pooling? If it does, and companies will not be left for a year in no man's land, that will be a satisfactory solution.

Dawn Primarolo: I rely on representations made to the Government in the consultation, but I am not aware that any company has claimed that its transactions will be affected and that the issue needs to be dealt with immediately. Businesses are saying that they want further consultation. Technical notes are being discussed in considerable detail, and the pre-Budget report made it clear that we are considering deferral or something better. The benefits of deferral have not been doubted.

The new clauses would encourage the Government to make legislation in haste. The hon. Gentleman wants us to pick one of his options, say, "That'll do", and add it to the Bill. I know that if we did, next year he would criticise the Government for poor drafting, even if it was his drafting. The matter is proceeding and we want to legislate in 2002, but we also want to ensure, through consultation with business, that our proposals will be a good fit now and help companies as well as standing the test of time. He will agree that our proposals must ensure, for example, that intellectual property rights are held here in the UK and that this is the most competitive place for businesses to be located, with the best environment for them to develop. If the hon. Gentleman agrees with those objectives, he should withdraw the new clause and await the outcome of consultation with business—something that he frequently implores the Government to do. In that way, we will achieve an agreed way forward, rather than a quick fix this year that will not work.

8 pm

Mr. Flight: I briefly take issue with two things that the Paymaster General said at the beginning of her remarks. First, she boasted of the Government's splendid record of consultation with business on this matter, but I remind her of the outrage felt by business when the original proposals were introduced by the Chancellor. They caused business's love affair with the Labour party to fall apart. As I commented earlier, it is fortunate for the good of the country that the Government have changed their mind.

Secondly, the Paymaster General is not taking the point that, in the past, offshore mixers worked. They enabled the UK to do extremely well in the multinational headquarters business. The time had come for something better, but it was not the case that a nagging problem had not been addressed.

However, I was glad to hear the Paymaster General's response. I may have missed something in one of the earlier debates on this matter, but she seemed to say a little more than she did in Committee. She did not respond completely to my main point—that businesses will have to restructure to move from offshore mixers to onshore pooling and that they must not be put in a void for a year while they wait for the issue to be resolved—but she went some way towards providing an answer to it.

The next Conservative Government will get on and deal with the matter. If that does not happen, the Paymaster General has promised that it will be dealt with in next year's Finance Bill. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 5

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION REBATES SCHEME

> '(1) The Treasury may by order made by statutory instrument introduce a scheme of rebates to those persons charged with the aggregates levy and who have employed environmental protection measures in the process of commercial exploitation of aggregate;
>
> (2) Environmental protection measures in this part are those measures which the Secretary of State shall by order determine to be in the interests of protecting or enhancing the environment;
>
> (3) No rebate under this scheme shall be made unless the environmental protection measures:
>
> (a) relate directly to the process of commercial exploitation of aggregate, and
>
> (b) shall have been verified and certified by an external body prescribed for that purpose by the Secretary of State;
>
> (4) A statutory instrument containing an order under this section shall not be made without prior consultation with those persons appearing to the Secretary of State to be representative of those having an interest in:
>
> (i) the commercial exploitation of aggregate;
>
> (ii) the protection of the natural environment;
>
> (iii) the local communities affected.
>
> (5) A statutory instrument containing an order under this section shall be laid before Parliament and approved by resolution of the House of Commons.'.—*[Mr. David Heath.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 1, in clause 16, page 12, leave out from line 18 to end of line 8 on page 41.

No. 3, in page 12, line 37, at end insert—

> '(7) The provisions of this section shall cease to have effect on 5 April 2004 unless the Treasury makes provision by order made by statutory instrument for its continuation.
>
> (8) The Treasury shall not make an order under subsection (7) above unless a draft of the order has been laid before Parliament and approved by resolution of the House of Commons.'.

No. 2, in schedule 4, page 102, leave out from line 18 to end of line 17 on page 143.

Mr. Heath: Returning to the aggregates tax seems like revisiting an old friend. The Financial Secretary will recall that I tabled an amendment and the new clause in Committee. They were connected: the amendment would have required the Government not to introduce the aggregates tax until they had introduced a rebate scheme, while the new clause would permit the Government to apply that rebate scheme to companies subject to the levy.

I shall not waste the House's time going over the arguments that I adduced in Committee. To my mind, they still hold true. I still believe that there is a serious design fault in the Government's proposals that will do enormous damage to the quarrying sector and to related industries, such as the concrete industry. Firms in my constituency, for example, will not benefit from the proposals.

The question before the House today is whether there should be a rebate scheme at all. What is the purpose behind the Government's proposed aggregates levy? We have heard the Government's justifications for it. The Budget 2000 statement said that the tax would generate

> "reductions in noise, dust, visual intrusion, damage to wildlife habitats and other environmental impacts."

Elsewhere, the Treasury stated in evidence that

> "the encouragement of recycling is the main tax purpose."

We have heard also that the tax would reflect the environmental cost of quarrying.

If the tax did that, it would be fine. However, I live in a quarrying area on the edge of the Mendips, and I know that it is far from obvious that the tax will bring with it any of the predicted benefits. It is also hard to see how it will improve the local environment.

The tax could easily improve local environments if there were a direct link between the performance of the quarrying companies in terms of what they do to protect or enhance the local environment and the protection of environmental amenities enjoyed by local residents. At present, residents suffer from all the ills that the Government cite as factors behind the introduction of the tax. The new clause would provide the appropriate mechanism to make the tax work. It would institute a system of rebate against the aggregates levy for companies prepared to take the necessary steps with regard to their processes, or to the infrastructure by which they quarry stone or transport it away. The new clause would reward that endeavour.

The Government's problem is that, without a rebate system, the tax will not achieve its stated objectives. That point has been made many times, in the House and outside it. Industry representatives and independent commentators share an opinion on this matter. The classic quotation is from Professor David Pearce, who is something of a guru when it comes to environmental taxes. I remember discussing his proposals in connection with the original Environmental Protection Act 1990. Mr. Chris Patten was Secretary of State for the Environment in the then Conservative Government, and he toyed with many of David Pearce's ideas, but did not bring many of them to fruition.

In July 1999, Professor Pearce conducted the only independent research into the proposal, and said that

> "we conclude that an aggregates tax is an extremely inefficient way to try and secure an environmental target."

[Mr. Heath]

That was his verdict, but it is not the end of the story. A rebate scheme would deal directly with the problems. New clause 5 covers the salient points. It provides that the Treasury could bring forward a statutory instrument to introduce the rebate scheme, but does not prescribe the exact form of that order. If the process turns out to be difficult, as the Financial Secretary has claimed, the new clause would permit time for the task to be accomplished. In Committee, I argued that the matter was urgent, but the urgency argument is not relevant to the new clause.

The new clause does not suggest that there should be a blank cheque for the companies involved; instead, it provides that the Secretary of State would determine the environmental measures to be taken. In other words, the Secretary of State would compile the tariff list of suggested measures that could and should be put in place, which would then be set against an audit of what had been done.

The new clause would link environmental protection measures to the process of commercial exploitation of aggregates, and tie them to the location of the quarrying. A criticism strongly voiced in my part of Somerset, and repeated in Leicestershire, Derbyshire and the other main quarrying areas, is that people do not see how they would benefit if an aggregates tax were introduced. They fear that the benefit would apply a lot further away, and not locally.

The new clause would also require that any benefit

> "should be verified and certified by an external body prescribed for that purpose"

by the Secretary of State. Again, it would not allow companies merely to claim to have done something: any action would have to be proved before the rebate came into effect.

That seems a sensible way forward. I cannot see that the Government would wish to produce any argument against that proposition, other than that it does not use their wording. If they intend to introduce a rebate scheme in the future—I sincerely hope that they do, and there is evidence that at least one other Department is keen on it—the new clause would provide them with a legal basis for doing so without bringing back to the House further primary legislation in the form of provisions included in a Finance Act or a separate Bill which would delay the process and make matters more difficult.

Even if the Government are not prepared to accept the words that I suggest, I hope that they will at least give a clear indication that they are committed to doing what they said they wanted to do and what they know they have to do to make the aggregates levy a genuine environmental tax rather than an imposition on the industry which has no direct environmental benefit and is to the detriment of the industry's commercial interests and competitiveness. The quarrying industry and those who are concerned about the local environment in the areas where quarrying takes place are waiting to hear from the Government a clear commitment that they intend to introduce this scheme and that it is being done as a matter of urgency. It would be absurd to introduce the aggregates levy without the only element that provides for local environmental benefit.

Mr. Letwin: First, let me say a few words first about the proposition of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). For reasons that I will come to, I am not—as the hon. Gentleman and others may know from the Committee stage and Second Reading—a great fan of this tax. However, the logic of the hon. Gentleman's argument is difficult to dispute.

The Financial Secretary has said on numerous occasions that he will continue discussions with the industry about the possibility of introducing an exemption scheme. If he is so minded, it must be true, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said, that it would be convenient to avoid the necessity for subsequent primary legislation. Indeed, it may be more than merely convenient—it may be necessary for the survival of large parts of the industry that it be possible to introduce the exemption scheme without the need for the laborious process of primary legislation.

We ought to hear today—although I harbour a doubt that we will—that the Financial Secretary has at last capitulated to the demands for at the very least an enabling clause of the kind proposed by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome. The Financial Secretary said in Committee not a day or two ago that an enabling clause did not commit the Government to very much. That is true. The resistance that the Government have so far displayed towards an enabling clause, however, suggests that they are not so convinced as they make out and that they will eventually introduce an exemption scheme. That would be lamentable. I hope that the expectations that I have voiced will be shown to be false and that the Financial Secretary will accept the hon. Gentleman's new clause.

As we have said repeatedly during the passage of the Bill and those parts of it relating to the aggregates levy, even with the exemption scheme, we strongly oppose the introduction of this new stealth tax. That is why we have tabled amendments Nos. 1, 3 and 2. At this point, I should declare an interest the nature of which has always eluded me, but which might exist.

8.15 pm

I am clear that there is a deficiency in the tax, even in the rational version of it entailing the hon. Gentleman's proposed exemption clause and regulations that provide for exemption. That version is rational because it might at least achieve the environmental effects that the tax purportedly seeks to achieve. In that, I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Our objection is to the triadic rhythm, which runs like this: the Government announce a tax, in the nature of a fine, for a particular segment of British industry. The second step is that the Government announce that people who behave well will not be subject to the fine. The third step is that the Government institute officials, in a more or less arbitrary fashion, to negotiate with particular parties in the industry sector about whether they are sufficiently good boys not to pay the fine.

That is not how to govern the country. We do not believe that there should be pre-ordained fines or that officials should be put in the position of judges, seeking to determine whether particular firms have behaved sufficiently like good boys or girls to avoid such fines. I grant that it may be effective—in that, I agree with the hon. Gentleman—but I do not think that it is proper. It is not the right way in which to go about achieving the aim.

If the aim is essentially regulatory, let the device be essentially regulatory. If the aim is to create a market or charging system, let the device be a charging system of tradeable permits or the like. If the aim is to create an economic incentive, let it be an incentive and not a penalty. None of those devices is the same as a fine, which people can avoid if they behave well in the judgment of some official. That is a route, not to immediate disaster, but gradually, by degrees, to an arbitrariness in government which I think even Labour Members will come to regret.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman's discourse with interest. Would he include in the list of avenues that might be considered the price mechanism, which applies in this case? I should have thought that, on reflection, he would agree that there could be an important role for the price mechanism in achieving environmentally beneficial results.

Mr. Letwin: I do not wish to prolong the debate, but I should like briefly to address the really interesting issue raised by the Financial Secretary. I suspect that all three parties are at one in believing that economic incentives, including pricing mechanisms, are in some circumstances appropriate for achieving desirable environmental effects. The problem about this tax, and particularly in relation to the way in which it is being implemented, is that it is not a pricing mechanism, because the elasticity at the other end—the supply elasticity—does not exist.

The tax will not reduce the propensity of people who are building buildings to use less that is made with aggregates, because that cannot be done. If there were a serious elasticity of building, the tax would slightly reduce the amount of building in the United Kingdom. I judge the effect to be minimal, however. The Financial Secretary has never brought forward an elasticity study suggesting anything to the contrary. Cross-elasticities, on the other hand, may be considerable, and I shall come to that.

The problem about the tax is that what elasticity effect it has is at the wrong end. It will drive out domestic aggregates production in favour of imported aggregates production, in the form of asphalt and pre-cast concrete. It will destroy British jobs, and in that, it will indeed be a price signal. However, that is not the price signal that the Financial Secretary wants to send, and the tax, in its present form, will have no other serious effect. So although we agree with the hon. Gentleman about the principle, he has unfortunately not translated that principle into practice in this instance.

That leads me directly to the essential point that I want to make tonight. I do not want to rehearse at length all the arguments that we made on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House about this tax; that would be tedious. I do want to place on the record and put in the mind of the Financial Secretary, who has exhibited a tendency to think about these things and to reach conclusions after debates, a series of answers to his response to a point that I made in the Committee of the whole House.

I argued in the Committee, as I had on Second Reading, that the effect of the tax would be seriously to displace employment from this country to southern Ireland and the northern continental shelf. The Financial Secretary said—I know from experience that when he says these things, he means them—that he did not believe that proposition. He said that he did not believe that the £1.60 a tonne of tax, even with the differential that it created with the zero tax rate in southern Ireland or the 5p tax rate in France, would be sufficient to offset the transport cost disadvantage of displacing production to those locations outside the United Kingdom.

To be absolutely fair to the Financial Secretary, because this is no party political game and I want to try to get this straight, I believe that he made that argument particularly about northern Europe—the northern continent. He was less firm about southern Ireland. I believe that he did take on board the issue in relation to southern and Northern Ireland.

I stress here that, essentially, we are dealing with the commodities that are made of aggregates, as opposed to the aggregates themselves. The aggregates themselves are correctly subject to tax if imported, just as if produced domestically.

I have looked into that assertion by the Financial Secretary since those debates in the Committee of the whole House, and I have consulted the industry. To say that I have done so widely would be hyperbole. I have consulted a number of people in the industry—among the small producers and the larger producers—who are very well informed, to try to get a sense of whether there is a serious problem of differentials. I want to try to identify briefly why I believe that there is a very serious problem of differentials.

Eight tenths of this argument depends on understanding that the £1.60 is not the end of the story. The first part of that part of the argument stems from the fact that £1.60 a tonne is a true assessment of the average cost of the tax to the producer, but, as we have had occasion to note in our rather lengthy debates about this matter—although not, alas, sufficiently lengthy in some cases—the production of aggregates is a highly complex business in the sense that many things are being produced simultaneously, some of which are the intended product and some of which are by-products. The Financial Secretary is as familiar with that reality as we are.

It is impossible to sell by-products and low-grade waste—in Committee, we had a long disquisition about dust—at full price. They cannot be sold at much above the price at which they are currently sold. That is what I am told by both sides of the industry—the aggregate producers and the construction industry. As a result, the average cost of production of the high-grade material will go up by more than £1.60 a tonne, because a hefty part of the tax, which would otherwise be borne by the by-products and will be chargeable to the by-products, will have to be loaded on to the price of the primary products. That, I suspect, is an inescapable conclusion.

Mr. David Heath *indicated assent.*

Mr. Letwin: I am glad to see that the hon. Gentleman, who knows a great deal about the industry—much more than I do—gives his assent to that proposition. I shall be very surprised if the Financial Secretary can produce any evidence that those assertions, which I believe to have been given to me in good faith by both sides of the industry, are false. The estimates that I have been given vary, but they

[Mr. Letwin]

centred around a 50 per cent. uplift. I believe that the effective rate of tax on the primary products will be not £1.60 but about £2.40.

Next we have to add the increased costs of administration. I do not want to exaggerate the case, because I want to make a genuinely robust case rather than a political statement. I do not know the increased cost of administration, but I am sure that the Financial Secretary will acknowledge that it will be more than zero. Dealing with a new tax and keeping the records required for it, especially in the case of—if I may be permitted a pun—the disaggregations required to deal with an aggregates tax that is to be levied on a series of commodities, some of which are exempt and some of which are not, with some that are exempt being produced at the same time as some that are non-exempt, making it difficult to disentangle one from another, is bound to occasion a significant increase in administrative costs for producers.

I have been given various estimates, and I do not know how reliable they are. I am inclined to think that 10p to 20p a tonne is a reasonable estimate of additional administrative costs. If I take the lower end of that scale, at about 10p, that takes us up to about £2.50 a tonne—£1.80 plus the uplift of 80p for the primary products, plus the 10p.

Taxes are collected by Customs and Excise with unvarying efficiency. *[Interruption.]* I say that with a degree of irony, in the sense that it is not always the case that Customs and Excise collects the right amount and it is not always the case that all our constituents feel that they are properly treated, but taxes are collected with unvarying efficiency in the sense that Customs and Excise always swoops early. This is not a party political point, although the Chancellor has certainly taken policy steps to advance tax receipts in many respects, including corporation tax. This is a point about administration under all Governments.

Customs and Excise quite properly sees it as its duty to protect the Revenue, so it swoops early. It looks for the money as soon as possible. That has a cash-flow effect on the firms that produce the goods, because the goods are not always sold quickly, and the definitions of commercial exploitation in the relevant sections of the Bill are, as we have had reason to note in lengthy discussion, such that one need not have sold the item to be liable to the tax. There will be a cash-flow effect. I do not know what it will be. I have taken estimates, and it sounds as though about 10p a tonne would not be an unreasonable estimate. That gets us to £2.60.

Undoubtedly, the administrative burden and the price increase will together conspire to accelerate the process of consolidation in the industry. To some degree that may be a good thing; for many producers it will be a bad thing. It is clear that it will tend to concentrate production in fewer locations. The Financial Secretary might argue that the tax is thereby having an effect, but one thing is sure: that that will tend to raise internal transport costs. I do not know the amount, but it has been suggested to me that it might be as high as 75p or as low as 50p. I will take the lower estimate and add 50p. We now have the following: £1.60 plus 80p equals £2.40; £2.40 plus 10p equals £2.50; £2.50 plus 10p equals £2.60; £2.60 plus 50p equals £3.10.

I am told that a differential of £3.10 is vastly greater than the transport cost differential implied by importing pre-cast concrete from northern Europe. If the Financial Secretary has figures to the contrary, we shall be most interested to hear them. Such a differential will clearly hugely exceed the transport costs from southern Ireland. If that were not the case, my estimate of the transport costs increase owing to consolidation in the industry would, clearly, also be too low, but I am told that moving pre-cast concrete by ship is an efficient method of transport—not, of course, one that would be applicable to the use of such concrete deep in Wiltshire, but perfectly applicable on the south coast and, indeed, through the London docks, in London.

8.30 pm

In other words, a large part of the construction industry in the United Kingdom could be serviced by pre-cast concrete from the northern ports of Europe at a far lower transport cost than would be involved because of the more than £3 differential that has been identified. That is a serious problem, but we have yet to hear from the Financial Secretary any set of equivalent figures, or disputations of those figures, that would allay our fears. We have not invented those fears; they have been expressed by the industry, which has, in principle, no reason to invent them. If it were true that the displacement of jobs and business would not occur, why should the industry care about the tax; it would merely pass it on to a virtually inelastic buyer—the construction industry? House occupiers and people trying to build business premises might object, but I have not the slightest idea why the industry would invent those figures, so there must be some truth in them.

Given all the arguments of principle that we have discussed at length and rehearsed again today and given the problems of implementation and the way in which the aggregates tax has been proposed in the Bill—for example, the failure to produce an exemption clause such as that suggested by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome—I am driven to the conclusion that there is a failure in the Government's factual analysis; they have not recognised that the differential will have a serious effect on thousands of jobs in the United Kingdom, and that needs to be addressed urgently.

Mr. Timms: I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman's points in detail in a moment, but before he completes his speech, will he confirm that it would be the intention of an incoming Conservative Government not to introduce the 0.1 percentage point reduction in employers' national insurance contributions that balances the revenue that we expect to receive from the aggregates levy?

Mr. Letwin: Yes, that is absolutely correct. The intention of an incoming Conservative Administration will be not to introduce the entire package, but to seek to negotiate with the industry the very kinds of environmental improvement that were so near to completion when some siren voice got at the Prime Minister and managed to reverse the trend of Government thinking, pushing them back into introducing an aggregates tax. We want to have a serious and adult discussion with the industry about how the environmental improvements can be achieved without this tax, which, of course, implies without the NIC reductions.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The hon. Gentleman's analysis of the projected extra costs is admirably rigorous, but does he accept that those figures are, by their very nature, tentative? The British Aggregates Association has come up with a figure of £4.35, whereas his is £3 or so. Is it not equally possible that the Government's approach, with the figure being very much at the low end of the spectrum, is likely to represent the eventual outcome? If it did not, could not a future Government respond by regulation?

Mr. Letwin: Well, that is possible. Of course there is room for uncertainty. I have also received the British Aggregates Association figures. I have consciously chosen the lower end of the estimates that we have received so that I cannot be accused of inventing figures for effect. Neither the hon. Gentleman nor I—and nor, and this is my problem, the Financial Secretary—knows what the exact figure is. If it is anything like any of the figures discussed by the industry, it is sufficient to outweigh the transport costs. That is the problem.

I may be wrong, but I do not understand how that problem can be cured within the structure of the tax. If that cannot be done and we all wake up three, four or five years from now and 5,000, 7,500 or 10,000 jobs—the estimates vary—have disappeared as a result, it will be too late; it will be impossible to re-create those jobs in the United Kingdom for years to come. We have a serious problem: the Government do not have the factual basis on which to be confident that the tax will not have those dire effects. That is why the House should accept the amendments tabled by Conservative Members.

Mr. Timms: As we have heard, under new clause 5, moved by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), a rebate would be allowed from the aggregates levy for so-called green quarries, and the rebate would be introduced by secondary legislation. We debated a very similar new clause in Committee yesterday. It was moved by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who is well able to look after himself on such occasions, but he withdrew it on the basis of the assurances that I was able to give him. Of course, I am happy to repeat those assurances today. I hope that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome agrees that his hon. Friend the Member for Gordon was right to withdraw his new clause after yesterday's debate in Committee.

I remind the House that the aggregates levy as set out in the Bill will have important and significant environmental benefits. It will do so by ensuring that the price of aggregates reflects the environmental cost of obtaining them—using a straightforward price mechanism for an environmentally beneficial end. That is a mechanism that the Liberal Democrat party well understands; it would thus be mistaken for the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome to suggest that the price mechanism will have no effect. There certainly will be an effect. I stress that point, because it is at the heart of the environmental benefit that we expect from the introduction of the aggregates levy.

Moreover, the package also includes the £35 million sustainability fund that will be available to be applied directly in communities that are affected by quarrying, to help to deal with some of the environmental problems caused by quarrying. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion that there was no direct environmental benefit from the package is mistaken. In those two specific respects, there will be clear environmental benefits from the levy. I again draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the sustainability fund. That important measure will benefit communities that are affected by quarrying, such as the one in which he lives.

We announced in the Budget that we are attracted to the idea of differential rates of aggregates levy for green quarries. We are exploring with a variety of interested parties options on how that might be achieved, but as I have pointed out several times, significant practical problems remain—not least the definition of a green quarry. We need to know how those issues can be overcome in a practicable and workable way before we introduce legislation to give effect to that idea. When we have a workable scheme, we shall legislate.

The new clause is guesswork. I suggest to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome that the scheme would need to take into account factors that are not referred to in the new clause, which is couched in terms of environmental protection measures being taken. However, other considerations might need to be taken into account. It is possible, for example, that the location of a quarry might have an impact on the extent of its environmental friendliness. I should certainly not want to exclude that possibility, as the new clause does. As I think that the hon. Member for Gordon acknowledged yesterday, during our debate in Committee on exactly the same proposal, nothing is to be gained in the meantime by introducing legislation that may well turn out not to be quite right when we have resolved the way forward—*[Interruption.]* I give way to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin).

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for giving way, although I was actually chuntering from a sedentary position. However, I will ask him a question. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should listen to a tape recording of his own remarks. Is he aware of just how "Yes, Ministerish" he sounds? If I had been the official charged with inventing every reason that I could think of—including reasons that I could barely think of—for rejecting the new clause, I could certainly not have come up with a better list than the one he has provided.

Mr. Timms: It would be classic "Yes, Minister" to introduce a new clause to do something when we do not quite know what we are trying to achieve. That would be a serious mistake and I could not support such a proposal. As I pointed out in yesterday's debate, the new clause sets out three groups which should be consulted. I can again assure hon. Members that we shall indeed consult representatives from all three of those groups.

Mr. Edward Davey: I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for giving way, especially as I was unable to be in the Chamber for all of the debate on the new clause. Will he confirm that the sustainability fund, which will produce the environmental improvements referred to in the new clause, is an intrinsic part of the levy? If he can

[Mr. Edward Davey]

confirm that, will he explain why he is going ahead with the levy even though he has not sorted out the sustainability fund?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman is confused. The sustainability levy is part of the package as it stands. It will have an initial value of £35 million and we are consulting on precisely how the fund will be applied and to what categories of use it will be put. The hon. Gentleman is mistaken: the fund will be in place from the introduction of the levy in April next year and does not depend on any of the mechanisms mentioned in the new clause.

Mr. David Taylor: Will my hon. Friend confirm whether he is to consult the British Precast Concrete Federation, which makes a very powerful case in favour of the pre-cast concrete industry being treated in same way as the clay, silica sand and cement industries, all of which will not be covered by the aggregates tax?

Mr. Timms: I confirm that I have in the past week met representatives of the British Precast Concrete Federation. We had a useful discussion. We are consulting widely on the measures, as we always do.

Amendments Nos. 1 and 2 propose abolition of the levy. The Committee of the whole House considered that matter at the start of Committee stage and took a clear view that the aggregates levy should be in the Bill. I have no doubt that that view will, rightly, be repeated today. The levy is being introduced to address the significant environmental costs associated with quarrying and it will bring about environmental benefits, as I have described. The introduction of the levy and the associated cut in employers national insurance contributions will contribute to the Government's strategy, consistently applied, of shifting the burden of taxation from good things, such as employment, to bad things, such as environmental damage. That was the intention we set out in our 1997 statement of intent on environmental taxation and it is the approach that we have taken.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for West Dorset for confirming that a Conservative Government would not proceed with the reduction in employers national insurance contributions. We have also heard that the Conservatives would reverse the reduction in employers national insurance contributions associated with the climate change levy—0.3 per cent. in that case. In addition, the hon. Gentleman has made more clear the Conservatives' intentions regarding the 0.2 per cent. reduction in employers national insurance contributions associated with the landfill tax. I do not know precisely why the Conservatives want to pile up taxation on employment, but I am certain that our approach of shifting the burden of taxation away from employment is the right one. We shall continue to pursue it.

The levy will be revenue neutral for the Exchequer because all of the proceeds will be recycled through the reduction in employers national insurance contributions and the £35 million sustainability fund that will help to develop alternatives to primary aggregates extraction and help to redress the local impact of quarrying in communities that are affected by it.

Mr. Letwin: Will the Financial Secretary give now the undertaking that he refused to give earlier: that if his Government are fortunate enough to be re-elected, each and any subsequent increase in the aggregates levy will be accompanied by an equal and opposite reduction in national insurance contributions or some other tax?

Mr. Timms: I do not want to discomfit the hon. Gentleman, but in our enjoyable debate on the subject in the Standing Committee yesterday, he made a lengthy case against the landfill tax, saying that we were giving out more in the reduction in employers national insurance contributions than we were taking in through the landfill tax. He was simply wrong about that: the revenue from the landfill tax is significantly less than—in fact, it is equivalent to about two thirds of—the revenue forgone through the reduction in employers national insurance contributions. The hon. Gentleman was mistaken in yesterday's debate and it is unwise of him to pursue that line of argument further today.

Mr. Letwin *rose*—

Mr. Timms: No, I want make some progress—a couple of other points need to be made to complete the picture. It is possible to make greater use of recycled aggregates, as we discussed in earlier debates. They will be more attractive because the price of primary aggregates will include an additional cost that will not apply to them, and that will be beneficial.

8.45 pm

In my response to my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor), I mentioned my discussions with manufacturers of pre-cast concrete blocks. The hon. Member for West Dorset made something of that. I do not believe that the prospect of significant imports from across the sea of pre-cast concrete blocks will be a serious problem. The industry did not suggest that. However, I accepted in an earlier debate that Northern Ireland might be a different case, and today I met the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and two representatives of the quarrying industry from Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive is also considering the problem, which we will continue to explore. The land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic means that the situation there is different.

As for concrete blocks from Norway or elsewhere in continental Europe, the cost of transport is a sufficiently high hurdle for the 1 per cent. of pre-cast blocks that are imported not to change. Those are specialist products and they do not reflect the bulk of what is produced in the United Kingdom.

Dr. McCrea: Having listened to those representations, when will the Government determine what action to take to alleviate the problem faced by businesses in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Timms: I can only repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Foyle this morning: we will work with the Northern Ireland Executive and, if there is a strong case for us to act, we will do so. I cannot, however, say precisely when that will be.

I hope that the House will hold to its clear view on the issue and reject the amendment. It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for West Dorset say that the

Conservative party would not implement the measure and, instead, would try to achieve a negotiated agreement with the industry. The Quarry Products Association and the Government invested much work in examining the prospects of a negotiated voluntary agreement. For several reasons, those discussions were not successful and the package that the QPA put to us for the Budget last year contained serious difficulties, not least the likelihood of falling foul of European law.

However, another reason for that lack of success was the great hostility of the British Aggregates Association, to which my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire referred. I think I am right in saying that the BAA came into existence when a group of small quarries came together to object to the big quarrying companies formulating an agreement that did not benefit them. The hon. Member for West Dorset needs to be cautious before believing that a negotiated solution is possible.

The real question facing hon. Members is whether we face up to the need to address the environmental costs of quarrying. If the House decides—as I believe it will—that that is necessary, our proposal is the right way to proceed.

Mr. David Taylor: My hon. Friend is right to say that Leicestershire has a significant mineral extraction industry. Many small firms operate there. Does he believe that the implementation of the levy risks accelerating the industry trend towards a smaller number of larger quarries, with the extra haulage costs and other problems that are associated with that?

Mr. Timms: I have not seen any evidence of that, and none that I am aware of has been forthcoming. The way in which the industry responds to the levy is a matter for the industry.

Amendment No. 3 at least has the merit that the House has not already rejected it, but the environmental costs of aggregates extraction will not cease in April 2004. Therefore, there is no justification for limiting the life of the levy to that date.

For the reasons that I have set out, I hope that the House will reject the new clause and the amendments.

Mr. David Heath: I listened with incredulity to the Financial Secretary's response. His arguments became steadily more preposterous as he went on. That might suggest that we have been right all along and that the impost has been cobbled together at short notice and is half thought through. That is why justifications for the levy are so lacking.

Mr. Timms: I am sorry to hear the hon. Gentleman say that. Will he at least acknowledge—as he did not in his opening remarks—that the sustainability fund and the £35 million that will be available will provide an opportunity to tackle some of the local quarrying issues that he referred to earlier?

Mr. Heath: I would do that if we knew what the sustainability fund will do. One of the arguments that the Financial Secretary adduced for not accepting the new clause was the fact that he did not yet know the precise detail of the environmental measures that it might encompass. Nevertheless, he is prepared to go ahead with imposing a tax on the industry without knowing the precise details—indeed, any details—of the sustainability fund. That is extraordinary.

The only lacuna that the hon. Gentleman could identify in my remarks related to some sort of concept of a retrospective planning permission being applied by tax rebate, so that those quarries that happened to be in the wrong place would be taxed out of the market in favour of those that happened to be in the right place. It would be interesting to know the exact mechanism that he had in mind and how it would play in terms of European competition law and the Human Rights Act 1998.

The Government have been very clear about what they consider to be the principles of good environmental taxation. They include the fact that an economic instrument must deliver environmental gains cost effectively and must not threaten the competitiveness of UK business. All of us accept that there is an imbalance between the needs of the quarrying industry—the motive for which is to build our infrastructure—and the environmental effects of quarrying. Those of us who represent the areas involved and who have been involved in discussions for more years than we care to remember know that there is a difficult balance to reach. We certainly do not turn our face against the need to provide for economic and environmental instruments to achieve the best balance possible.

We simply say that a tax mechanism that fails to differentiate between environmentally sound and environmentally unsound operations is not such an instrument. Because the Government are going ahead without knowing what they will do, we can conclude only that the most important thing for them is appearing to be doing something that is of environmental benefit rather than actually doing something that is of environmental benefit to quarrying areas.

The most sensible thing that the Financial Secretary could have said was that he would take the tax away and return with it next year, when it has been properly designed and is in a correct form with a rebate system. We could then all agree that we had an economically and environmentally sound scheme. Instead, we have something which, frankly, is nonsense.

We are keen to discuss other groups of amendments in the limited time available—so, for that reason alone, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 6

EXTENSION OF CARRY BACK OF TRADING LOSSES

'(1) Section 393A Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (set-off of trading losses against profits of previous three years) shall be amended in accordance with subsections (2) and (3) below.

(2) In subsection (2), after "(2A)", and before "below", insert the words "and (2D)".

(3) After subsection (2C), insert the following new subsection—

"(2D) this subsection shall have effect in relation to any loss incurred by a company which is not large (as defined by SI 1998/3175 as subsequently amended)—

(a) as if in subsection (2) above, the words 'three years' were substituted for the words 'twelve months'; and

(b) which is incurred in any accounting periods ending in the period beginning on 1 April 2000 and ending on or before 31 March 2003.".'.—*[Mr. David Heath.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. David Heath: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 7—*Extension of carry back of excess interest costs*—

'(1) Chapter II of Part IV of the Finance Act 1996 (loan relationships) shall be amended in accordance with subsections (2) and (3) below.

(2) In paragraph 3(7) of Schedule 8 (permitted period of twelve months for carry-back of deficits), after "means" and before "the period" insert "subject to paragraph 3(7A) below".

(3) After paragraph 3(7) of Schedule 8, insert the following new paragraph—

"3(7A) This paragraph shall have effect in relation to a deficit, incurred by a company which is not large (as defined by SI 1998/3175 as subsequently amended)—

(a) as if in paragraph 3(7) above, the words 'three years' were substituted for each case of the words 'twelve months'; and

(b) which is incurred in any accounting periods ending in the period beginning on 1 April 2000 and ending on or before 31 March 2003.".'.

New clause 8—*Relief for furnished holiday lettings*—

'(1) Section 504 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (Letting of furnished holiday accommodation treated as a trade, supplementary provisions) shall be amended in accordance with subsections (2) and (3) below.

(2) In subsection (3)(6) the figure "70" shall be replaced by the figure "30".

(3) This section shall only apply for accounting periods ending in the period beginning on 1 April 2001 and ending on or before 31 March 2002.'.

Mr. Heath: These new clauses allow the House, should it wish—even at this late stage of this Parliament—to do something effective for businesses seriously affected by the foot and mouth crisis. Businesses in my constituency and in many rural constituencies throughout the country that have been affected by the crippling economic consequences of the disease simply do not understand why the Government are deaf to their need to survive this year.

The epidemic has been awful for the livestock industry. However if—and it is a big "if" because, in my own county of Somerset, new cases are being reported every day, so we are by no means sure that the epidemic is over—we are drawing to the end of the animal disease epidemic, I assure hon. Members that we are entering an epidemic of business failures in rural areas. Businesses in rural parts of Britain such as the south-west all say that they have suffered an extraordinary reduction in turnover in the past few months. I am sure that that also applies to the north-west and the north-east, where foot and mouth has done its worst, and even areas passed over by the epidemic, which have suffered in the same way from the downturn in economic circumstances and tourism. It is not just businesses directly associated with agriculture or tourism that have suffered; a huge spectrum of businesses in every sector in every town and village throughout rural Britain has been affected.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although a devastating tragedy has hit many livestock farms, particularly smaller family farms, at least they have some cash flow coming through? Businesses that are indirectly affected, however, are the hidden victims of this terrible scourge and have no prospect of any cash flow improvement in the coming months. They are having a desperate time in making a good case to their bank managers to keep going.

Mr. Heath: My hon. Friend is right. The consequential losses, which no one could have expected, are quite extraordinary, and a range of businesses are involved. I have mentioned in the House before a garden centre in my constituency whose takings are down by 80 per cent. A dealer in lawnmowers and similar equipment has had his takings reduced by two thirds. A marquee manufacturer in my constituency has as its principal clients the major agricultural shows, all of which have been cancelled; the Royal Bath and West show, for example, is not happening. The firm is having to lay off workers because it no longer has any orders. Another such firm is a laundry whose trade is mainly with the hotel industry. It must now shut up shop. I even have in my constituency an animal incinerator which must close its doors because no one can bring animals to be burned, because of the foot and mouth restrictions. These are serious matters which are affecting the rural economy in a big way. What is so disappointing is the paucity of ideas and the lack of urgency on the part of Government in dealing with these issues.

Mr. Letwin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Every hon. Member of whatever party who represents a rural constituency would agree with him. Does he agree that we probably face an increase in the problems to which he alluded as we come to the summer months? That is the time on which many of our tourism-related industries in rural areas depend for the great bulk of their income, and that is when we shall see the crisis magnified, long after, as we all hope, the disease has virtually disappeared.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman is right. He knows and I know that a crisis taskforce was set up. It goes away and ponders, and that is all it does. The Minister for the Environment who chairs the taskforce gave a preliminary report, which was the last that the House heard about what it intended to do to deal with the crisis. We have a so-called Rural Affairs Cabinet Committee. What has it done during the crisis? Nothing, as far as anyone can see.

I exclude from these strictures the Minister of Agriculture, who has reported frequently to the House about what he has been doing, but of course his purview is limited to the agricultural aspects. One of the problems to which we have repeatedly drawn attention is the fact that we do not have a Department of Rural Affairs, which might have taken a wider view and recognised the fact that there is a crisis for the rural economy, not simply for the agricultural industry.

We are failing in our duty because the Government have not allowed the House the opportunity to give proper scrutiny to measures that could have been introduced over the past few weeks. Now we face the extraordinary prospect that the House will dissolve at the beginning of next week without our having the opportunity properly to discuss in Government time the proposals that they might have introduced to deal with the crisis.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that so far 7,000 businesses have been helped, and £40 million worth in tax has been deferred by Customs and Exercise and the Inland Revenue to help businesses affected by foot and mouth?

Mr. Heath: Does the hon. Lady not understand that that is a drop in the ocean compared with magnitude of the crisis in our rural areas? Deferment of tax simply puts off the evil day when the bailiffs come in. That is the problem that the Government do not seem to understand.

The measures proposed in the new clauses are not the only steps that the Government should take, but they are at least an attempt to deal with issues such as restoring cash flow to many small businesses in rural areas and elsewhere, and giving them an immediate benefit through the tax system. The carry-back of trading losses and excess interest costs could be made against previous years' accounts, which would provide immediate benefit and help them get through the present crisis, rather than offering help at some indeterminate stage in the future.

Miss Johnson *rose—*

Mr. Heath: The hon. Lady wants to intervene, but she knows that we have limited time for the debate.

Miss Johnson: I am anxious that the hon. Gentleman will not allow me any time at all to respond to the debate. In four minutes the time will be up. Is he aware of the non-tax measures that have been taken, which will assist all the businesses affected by foot and mouth? Those measures include providing temporary relief for business rates, whereby authorities can offer hardship relief to small businesses with a rateable value of £12,000 or less, in the knowledge that central Government will reimburse 95 per cent. of the cost. There is an extension of the small loans guarantee. There is a Phoenix fund aimed at helping small business in the most distressed communities. There are regional venture capital funds as well. A further £18 million is being made available to help promote Britain as a tourist destination. Additional measures include a £15 million package—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady cannot reply to the debate in an intervention.

Mr. Heath: I hope that the hon. Lady is not castigating me for what her business managers consider to be the appropriate time for debating this important matter, for which not one minute of Government time has been given. It is an outrage that we are being told that we must hurry our comments on this crucial problem facing the country, especially rural areas, prior to the coming general election. We are told that there is not time to discuss it. That tells us all we need to know about the Government's attitude to rural areas.

I will place a bet with the hon. Lady that more businesses will go out of business in rural areas over the next few months. She clearly considers her measures to be magnanimous, generous and adequate. People in rural areas do not think so. The people who came to lobby the House from Powys in mid-Wales and from Cumbria were desperately seeking something from the Government and the House to keep their businesses going over this summer. The proposals in the new clause would be a start, and would certainly be more adequate than anything that the Government have come up with so far. If the Government cannot accept it, they must answer to the people in rural areas who will lose their businesses in the next few weeks. They must tell those people why they sat by and did nothing while a disaster for the rural economy unfolded.

Mr. Letwin: I do not want to detain the House for long. We thoroughly agree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), and we would have liked other measures to have been introduced. We have been arguing for months for measures such as the £500 million interest-free loan scheme. The proposals in these new clauses would be beneficial.

By her tone of voice, the Economic Secretary showed the Government's neglect and misunderstanding of rural areas. Contrary to the tone in which some of the rational debates of the past three hours have been conducted, the tone in which the Economic Secretary replied to the hon. Gentleman was demonstrative of a total lack of understanding of the scale of the disaster that is and will be faced by rural business in the tourism-related sector as we approach the summer months. What has already—

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Programme motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 129, Noes 259.

Division No. 206] **[9.8 pm**

AYES

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*

Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*

Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, Rt Hon James
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Paul Tyler and
Mr. Edward Davey.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*

Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Lammy, David
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David

McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*

Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 264, Noes 121.

Division No. 207] **[9.24 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm

Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Lammy, David
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David

McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen

Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moss, Malcolm
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, Rt Hon James
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Atkinson and
Mr. Peter Luff.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill Programme (No. 2)

9.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth): I beg to move,

That the Order of 30th April 2001(Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill (Programme)) shall be varied as follows:—

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Order shall be omitted.

2. Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at today's sitting and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order.

The motion gives the House two hours to complete consideration of this small but important Bill. It was considered in Committee yesterday morning, and the Committee completed its line-by-line consideration in just under two and a half hours. This evening, the House has only one group of amendments to consider. I hope that all hon. Members will agree that two hours will allow sufficient time for a full debate of the issues before the Bill is sent on to another place.

I urge hon. Members to agree the motion, so that we can begin consideration of the amendments.

9.37 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Few Bills, other than those covering genuine emergencies, can have had so little time devoted to them in Committee or on the Floor of the House as has been devoted to this measure. I remind the House that the Prime Minister promised this Bill on 30 March 2000. It did not have a Second Reading until a week ago, so we have already suffered a long delay because of the Government's incompetence in turning the Prime Minister's promise into a Bill.

As the Minister said, the Committee yesterday had only two and a half hours—

Mr. Ainsworth: We had all day but did not need it.

Mr. Paice: The Minister says from a sedentary position that the Committee had all day but did not need it, but, if he were to be frank, he would acknowledge that some matters received extremely cursory attention because of the pressure to make progress, as I shall describe in a moment.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): The hon. Gentleman was not there.

Mr. Paice: I may not have been in the Committee, but I am perfectly able to read the *Hansard* report of the sitting. I have done so, but I suspect that the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) has not.

The Opposition have supported the principle behind the Bill, as we made clear on Second Reading—indeed, I called for this measure three years ago—but the Government are again confusing support for a principle with support for the detail of a measure.

Many matters arise from the Bill with which the Opposition do not agree, some of which were considered yesterday, such as the definition of rural areas and rural businesses and the level of rateable value. In respect of the latter, the Government advanced rather obscure arguments in favour of the figure of £6,000, but a figure of £9,000 for pubs and petrol stations appeared in secondary legislation only two or three weeks ago. Considerable concern has been expressed about how a shop should be defined. That is the subject of the amendments that we shall debate shortly, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) will move. There was much discussion on Second Reading about the definition of a shop, the fact that takeaway food and confectionery were excluded and what percentage of the business those items could account for if the exclusion was to have effect.

There is also the issue of the Bill's impact on existing businesses. The equestrian sector—riding schools, livery stables, stud farms and many other equestrian activities—will be greatly affected.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is debating the Bill, but we are on the programme motion.

Mr. Paice: I am endeavouring to explain why I do not believe that there is sufficient time under the motion, Mr. Speaker, but of course I heed your admonition.

The equestrian sector of rural industry will be seriously affected, yet when the Bill was in Committee yesterday, that sector was debated for only 10 minutes. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) moved an amendment and, almost in the same breath, was persuaded to withdraw it, without any substantial debate having taken place. Yet it has been said on Second Reading and in Committee that the Bill will affect equestrian businesses because the existing businesses, which receive no rate relief other than the traditional stud farm relief—introduced by the previous Government, I am pleased to say—will be competing with new equestrian businesses that will secure the rate relief under the Bill. Nothing in the Bill as it stands corrects that unfair situation. No one could contend that the 10 minutes of debate that this subject received in Committee yesterday was adequate to deal with what everyone accepts is a substantial rural business—indeed, it is the second largest rural business after farming.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about equestrian businesses. In retrospect, I regret that I was weak enough to accept the rough looks that I was receiving across the Floor. Labour Members had heard that the Prime Minister had gone to Buckingham palace and were so excited by this momentous event that they were determined that the Committee's proceedings would end by lunchtime. In retrospect, I wish that we had given the subject much more time during the afternoon. Not only are these immensely important issues for the countryside, but the rates charged for equestrian businesses are extremely complicated and would have benefited from detailed examination.

Mr. Paice: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As he knows, I have taken a close interest in the industry ever

[Mr. Paice]

since I have been a Member of this House because of my constituency involvement with the racing industry. It is a very important sector of the rural economy.

My hon. Friend was persuaded to curtail debate yesterday to some 10 minutes, which he now regrets.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I was talking only today to someone who runs an equestrian centre. The industry is suffering hugely because of the foot and mouth crisis, with bridleways being closed. The lady to whom I spoke is going out of business.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is talking about the Bill, not the programme motion.

Mr. Leigh: I was just going to say—

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was just going to say anything.

Mr. Paice: I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) will seek to catch your eye later, Mr. Speaker, and may be able to debate the Bill in more detail. A lot of points will need to be made on Third Reading.

The programme motion deals not only with amendments but with the time allocated for Third Reading. My hon. Friends the Members for North Wiltshire and for Gainsborough, who obviously have cogent and important points to make on Third Reading, may be prevented from doing so by the timetable motion.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman has, among other things, suggested that there was not sufficient time to debate the Bill in Committee. He said that he has read *Hansard*, despite not being in the Committee. I refer him to the point in the Committee's proceedings when the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) said that there was cross-party consensus that no more time was needed beyond 10 pm. I remind the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) that the Committee finished before 1 pm.

Mr. Paice: The Minister falls into his own trap. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire said that there was consensus that there was no need to go beyond 10 pm, yet the business was curtailed at 12.55 pm, which shows that he was right that those matters should have been debated in Committee until 10 pm last night, but were not.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Is not the Minister making the error, which Ministers habitually make on these occasions, of supposing that the adequacy of consideration in Committee is synonymous with adequacy of consideration on the Floor of the House? I did not have the good fortune to serve on the Committee. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need adequate time to justify our inclusive approach in relation to these matters, compared with the rather narrow, undesirable, priggish exclusivity of the Government?

Mr. Paice: The only aspect of my hon. Friend's intervention to which I would take exception is the generality with which he used the word Minister. I would say "Ministers of this Government" because, although my hon. Friend was not in the House at the time, I can assure him that Ministers in the previous Government did not adopt that approach.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), I did have the honour to serve on the Committee. Does my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) agree that, in tune with what the Father of the House said earlier this afternoon, the true scrutiny role of the House should be performed on the Floor of the House rather than in Committee on an upper corridor?

Mr. Paice: That is one of the points on which I did agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) in his farewell statement to the House, although of course I did not agree with everything that he said.

In conclusion, I want to raise a point about abattoirs, which are directly affected by the Bill.

Mr. Bercow: Put a few Ministers in them!

Mr. Paice: I am sure that there will be a long queue for them if my hon. Friend's desire is met, but the serious point—Third Reading would allow the opportunity to expand on it—is that part of the reason for the foot and mouth crisis and the rapid spread of the disease was the absence of abattoirs.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): You closed them all.

Mr. Paice: I can assure the hon. Gentleman, who shouts from a sedentary position, that the rate of closure under his party's Government is substantially higher than it was under the previous Government.

The crucial point is that the Bill will affect abattoirs, partly because it is the farmers and the farm business premises that may be currently consigning animals to abattoirs, but also because many farmers may wish to use the provisions of the Bill to gain—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has dispensed with the programme motion and is talking about the Bill, but we can talk only about the programme motion at the moment.

Mr. Paice: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker.

I contend that the programme motion does not provide adequate time to cover all the points that should be made, both in ways—

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Paice: I will just finish the point.

The motion does not provide adequate time to debate the amendments, which my right hon. Friend will deal with, or to debate all the arguments that should be debated on Third Reading, which are beginning to come in a flurry from my right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. Jack: Does my hon. Friend agree that the very fact that we have amendments to debate, and indeed a Third

Reading to consider, offers us the opportunity for mature reflection on arguments that were put, albeit inadequately, in Committee, hence the fact that this evening we are now faced with further amendments to the Bill, justifying a greater amount of time than the two hours offered by the Government?

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. In Committee, the Minister promised to take away some items and consider them further, and I do not believe that the two hours that we have been allocated is adequate, particularly in view of the fact that Ministers have only had from yesterday morning until today to consider those items. We are under pressure to pass the Bill before dissolution. Tomorrow, the Bill will go to another place and is expected to pass through all its stages in order to receive Royal Assent before Dissolution. Therefore, we shall lose the opportunity that is normally allowed for any legislation, which may not be given proper scrutiny in the House, to go to the other place for more in-depth scrutiny, using the expertise that we all know exists there.

Mr. Jack: Has my hon. Friend considered the fact that the Minister may have a rather restricted view on the amount of time needed by virtue of his former incarnation as a Government Whip? As we all know, the Government Whips' objective is to get business through the House at any cost.

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend's experience of those matters tells in such debates. Not all hon. Members necessarily share his cynicism, but I can vouchsafe that I do, having been a Member as long as he has and having seen the machinations of the dark corners of the Whips Office. I understand that the business takes precedence, rather than any propriety in scrutinising legislation.

The Bill is important in itself. We welcome it in principle, but believe that it should be given greater scrutiny on Report, on Third Reading and in the other place. I regret very much that the Government have seen fit to introduce a two-hour timetable. Given that we are still at a very early stage of the night's proceedings compared with what we were used to only a few years ago, there could have easily been time to give the Bill the far greater scrutiny that it will not now be given. That is a great shame, but there are many points that my hon. Friends and I wish to make in debating the amendments and on Third Reading, and we shall demonstrate the validity of the arguments that I have adduced against the motion.

9.52 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): This is, by common consent on both sides of the House, a modest Bill. It is limited in scope, flawed in detail, late in formulation and even more dilatory in execution, but with all its manifest inadequacies, it is important and should reach the statute book before Parliament is dissolved. I do not believe that we should take up the time that our constituents properly expect us to spend debating what is—or is not—in the Bill with a sterile argument on process. I urge the House to move on to the debate on the Bill itself. Let us pass it into law at the earliest opportunity because, however inadequate, it is better than nothing.

9.53 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I rise to contribute briefly to the programme motion debate on this modest Bill, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) rightly describes it, for two reasons. First, as I said a moment ago, in retrospect, I am sorry that yesterday's debates in Committee were so sharply curtailed. Hon. Members will remember that there was an atmosphere of excitement as the helicopters hovered overhead and the Prime Minister made his stately way down the Mall to visit Her Majesty the Queen to request the Dissolution of Parliament. There was a general feeling in Committee that sitting around for an afternoon discussing such matters was not the right thing to do. I regret that I gave in to that feeling and allowed my remarks on important matters connected with the horse industry to be limited to only 10 minutes.

Perhaps I should declare an interest: I am the chairman of the horse and pony taxation committee—an informal committee of the House, established by my noble Friend Lord Cope of Berkeley, who will wish to take a close interest in the Bill's equestrian provisions when it is debated in the other House tomorrow. Furthermore, I am an unpaid consultant to the British Horse Industry Confederation, a body that brings together all the interests of the horse industry throughout the nation. The Bill's provisions will have a significant effect on that industry; we have been debating such matters in the committee and the confederation for many years. As long ago as 1987, we nearly brought in an amendment to the Finance Bill that would have changed the status of the horse on farms to that of an agricultural animal, thereby removing business rates from all buildings in which horses were accommodated. These are complex matters and we in the horse industry are concerned about elements of the Bill that will help the industry in some respects but that may be worrying in others.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): What does that have to do with the programme motion?

Mr. Gray: Although programme motions have only recently been invented, I am surprised that after his many years in this place, the hon. Gentleman does not understand the relevance of my comments. The answer is that the amendment that we tabled on equestrian matters has not been selected. That means that the only detailed discussions took place yesterday when, sadly—in retrospect, I regret it—I curtailed my remarks on that complex subject. I thus seek extensive time on Third Reading to discuss those matters. Unfortunately, only two hours to discuss everything—the programme motion, amendments and Third Reading—is not enough to discuss extraordinarily complex matters.

I do not think that the hon. Gentleman knows anything about the business rate regime in so far as it affects horse matters on farms. It is extraordinarily difficult, delicate and complex. Broadly speaking, it achieves cross-party consensus. We are talking about riding schools throughout the nation. We are not talking about something grand but about something very ordinary: horse matters in all our constituencies.

It is thus a matter of great regret that neither in Committee yesterday nor, because of the programme motion in the House today, shall we have any time to

[Mr. Gray]

discuss such complex matters as how riding schools have declined in recent years. Every year, 200 riding schools disappear because of the tax and rating system that we shall debate later.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What has that got to do with the programme motion?

Mr. Gray: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not understand by now but I shall try again. It is important that I should explain how complex such matters are so that it should be clearly understood that we do not have enough time to discuss them. If they were small and simple, we could discuss them in a few seconds, but because they are difficult, and because he does not have the faintest idea of them, I must explain that we do not have enough time.

Mr. Leigh: What my hon. Friend's comments have to do with time is this: as riding stables go out of business every day of the week and as the industry is in crisis, the House should be given time to debate these matters to bring them to the attention of Ministers and to try to put pressure on them. The industry accounts for 6 per cent. of the total work force. There is minimal—indeed, no—compensation. We need time to discuss that. Again and again, the Government ram through programme motions—two hours here, one hour there. That is not good enough. People are not being properly represented.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point well. In this country, 2.4 million people ride horses; 1 million horses are kept. The equestrian industry is the second largest in the countryside. We are talking about—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait until we discuss the Bill before he tells us how many equestrian exercises are going on throughout the country.

Mr. Gray: Of course, Mr. Speaker, I will happily do so.

The business rate regime covering equestrian businesses in the countryside is badly flawed; there are peculiar anomalies. For example, if a private stable is next door to one's house—attached by a wall—it is exempt from business rates in the countryside. If, however, the private stable is at some distance from the house, it is not exempt and one has to pay business rates on it even though it is an entirely private—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I point out again to the hon. Gentleman that that has nothing to do with the programme motion. He must wait until we move on to the Bill to tell us those interesting facts.

Mr. Gray: I understand, Mr. Speaker.

The point that I was making—albeit inadequately as I am inexperienced in such matters—is that the two hours available to deal with the whole process, including amendments on village shops and Third Reading, are wildly inadequate for covering the complex detail of the rating regime as it affects equestrian businesses in the countryside. However, I think that we have had an opportunity to make that reasonably clear. That brings us back to the process—

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) and Order [this day].*

ESTIMATES, 2001-02

Resolved,

That further resources, not exceeding £149,381,539,000 be authorised for use for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2002, and that a further sum, not exceeding £144,305,891,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to meet the costs of defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 2002, as set out in HC 345, 346, 347 and 348.—*[Mr. Timms.]*

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in on the foregoing resolution; And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Andrew Smith, Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Stephen Timms and Miss Melanie Johnson do prepare and bring it in.—*[Mr. Timms.]*

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Mr. Stephen Timms accordingly presented a Bill to appropriate the supply authorised in this Session of Parliament: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time this day, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 96].

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading Read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Order [this day] and Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

RATING (FORMER AGRICULTURAL PREMISES AND RURAL SHOPS) BILL PROGRAMME (NO. 2)

Question again proposed.

Mr. Leigh: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I feel that it should be placed on record that we, the House of Commons, have just approved estimates for £149 billion in 55 seconds—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me reply. We have acted in accordance with long-standing Standing Orders, and these matters are, of course, properly recorded.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not true that it took only 55 seconds because the Conservative party did not want to vote against it?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot comment on those matters.

Mr. Leigh: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. No debate is allowed, so that was a completely duff point of order.

Mr. Speaker: I have a nicer way of putting things than the hon. Gentleman Mr. Gray.

Mr. Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It puts the little matter that we are discussing into context to think that, according to the explanatory notes, if the Bill becomes law, up to £16 million will be spent over five years, which translates as roughly £3 million a year. When I compare that with the £149,381,539,000 that we agreed in a matter of seconds, perhaps I should be grateful for the fact that we have two hours in which to discuss a mere £16 million.

However, in the countryside, post-foot and mouth disease, the £16 million is crucial to the farms that the Bill will allow to diversify. That diversification will be crucial to the riding schools and other equestrian businesses throughout the nation that are going out of business. The matter is of great importance, which is why I believe that the time allocated to it is wildly inadequate.

The Programming Sub-Committee met yesterday morning at 10 o'clock. I made the point that it is absurd to have a Committee in which no record is taken. There is no purpose in the Opposition and the Government debating the programming proposed by the Government if there is no one present to take note of those points. Members of the Programming Sub-Committee then have to repeat in Standing Committee the valuable points that they made so that they are put on the record. I hope that the Modernisation Committee, or whatever abstruse organisation is responsible for such matters, will take that into account and consider keeping an official record of Programming Sub-Committees so that our powerful points on whether enough time is available are recorded and perhaps referred to when subsequent programming motions are discussed.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point about the absence of a verbatim record or even of a minute of the proceedings of the Programming Sub-Committee that considers the terms of a programme motion. That concern has been raised before, not least in relation to other Bills. Does he accept that one reason why that is problematic is that the absence of a record tends inevitably to lead to argument about who said what in the Committee, when they said it, or whether they said it at all?

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes a good point. He has participated in many Programming Sub-Committees and knows their shortcomings. I believe that you, Mr. Speaker, are considering whether a *Hansard* reporter should be present to produce a formal record of what happens in them. That would be an eminently sensible innovation for the new Parliament to consider.

There is another absurdity to take into account. As the Minister said, the Programming Sub-Committee was reasonably agreeable towards the Bill's timetable. That was because the Bill has broad cross-party support and we thought that it was sensible to sit until 10 o'clock last night. I shudder to mention it in public, but the usual channels had duly considered that factor well in advance of the sitting of the Programming Sub-Committee. Therefore, its meeting was absurd and a waste of time. That highlights the nonsense that has come about as a result of the Government's so-called programming ideas. Either both sides of the House agree on a suitable programme for discussion of such matters, or they do not. By and large, we have agreed since time immemorial; rarely have we disagreed on how much time should be given to discuss a Bill or other business.

However, if we disagree, there is no *Hansard* reporter to take a note of that fact and the reasons for it, which means that we have to repeat our arguments in Standing Committee. The system makes no sense. The programme motion for this Bill was relatively generous and the Bill could, theoretically, have been discussed in Standing Committee until 10 o'clock last night. Both sides of the House agreed to that. None the less, two Ministers, two Whips and half a dozen Back Benchers had to spend five or 10 minutes yesterday morning meeting in a Committee to agree something that had already been approved. I hope that those points will be noted when the future of programming is considered in the next Parliament. It has not worked. Well established and acceptable procedures have managed to achieve the same results.

In that context, allowing us only two hours today to discuss the Bill's remaining stages perhaps reflects the fact that we did not make use of the full time allocated to us last night. That was because of the great excitement buzzing around the Committee Room as a result of the Prime Minister's announcement. However, that was before we saw his nauseating performance in the school in Southwark, which made the nation call for the sick bag.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is certainly straying from the programme motion.

Mr. Gray: You are, of course, right, Mr. Speaker. I apologise, but I was so overcome by the horror of what I saw on the news last night that I deviated from the motion.

The truth is that the Bill deals with difficult and important matters. The issue is complicated and important to hon. Members who represent rural constituencies. I hope that the Government will see sense and, even at this late hour, allow us more time to have a proper discussion of village shops and the diversification of farms. I am particularly concerned about the equestrian industry. Either they should give us more time tonight or, at the very least, the Minister should assure us that they have listened carefully to our concerns. They are reasonably aware of the problems facing the equestrian industry. In the unlikely event that they form a Government after 7 June, I hope that they will say that they will consider these points. The Conservative party has said that, when we are in government, we will impose zero business rates on equestrian industries and other businesses in the countryside.

10.10 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): The point made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) needs to be answered, because it is one that Liberal Democrat Members regularly make in these debates. They say that these are important matters and that we should not spend time debating the programme motion because that takes up some of the time that we have available to discuss the Bill. We only have two hours to discuss the remaining stages of the Bill, so the pressure is on us to shut up. Every minute that we take on the programme motion means that less time is available for consideration of the Bill. That is a sort of kowtow version of politics, whereby the Opposition have to give way to Government blackmail and the way in which they ram legislation through Parliament.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend has generously complimented the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome

[Mr. Bercow]

(Mr. Heath) on his remarks on the programme motion, but the said hon. Gentleman does not even have the courtesy to listen to the compliment that is being paid to him.

Mr. Leigh: I do not want to get involved in that debate because the hon. Gentleman is having an important discussion elsewhere. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): It is disgraceful of Conservative Members to make such comments when my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) is talking to Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Leigh: It does not matter who the hon. Gentleman is speaking to. The fact is that he made a point and I was seeking to reply to it. We cannot let that point pass. The Opposition cannot be put under moral pressure not to do what Oppositions have traditionally done, which is to debate programme motions properly. We have a perfect right to do that.

Each time we debate a programme motion, the Government look back through history and quote all the times that Conservative Governments introduced guillotine motions. It is true that, on occasion, Conservative Governments have had to introduce guillotine motions. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Yes, I accept that we did that. The then Opposition sought, quite rightly from their point of view, to prolong debate because that weapon was available to them. When Labour Members were in opposition, they did that extremely well. I sat through many Standing Committees in which they spoke at length. They were not filibustering and were not out of order, and sometimes we spent many hours in Committee.

The sittings of the Committee on which I served and that considered the Bill that led to the privatisation of British Telecom went on for more than 100 hours, and we considered hardly any of the clauses. It was on occasions such as those that Conservative Governments introduced programme motions. We then had a great set-piece debate on the Floor of the House, which lasted for three hours. Important Front Benchers made speeches and the argument went to and fro across the Floor. It was a big occasion. Now, as a matter of course, the Government introduce programme motions for everything. I know that some Members argue that that is the right way to proceed, but, surely, programme motions should be introduced on the basis of consensus and the House should not be treated with contempt. The Government should not say that matters that are important—they affect the livelihoods of those who run equestrian centres and village shops—will receive only two hours of debate.

The Government say, "If you want to talk about the programme motion, you'll get even less time, mate. It's up to you. Just take it and be stuffed." That is what they are saying and it is simply not good enough. When programme motions are introduced, we shall argue again and again the point that the House must have more time.

I do not understand what the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said. In his first breath, he said that this was a modest Bill that had much to be modest about, but in his second sentence he said that it was a very important Bill. He is a Liberal. Is it an important Bill or a modest one? Is it a complex Bill or one that does not need much debating? Does it affect people's real lives? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can enlighten us.

Mr. David Heath: I am grateful—

Miss McIntosh: The hon. Gentleman is back.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Lady intervenes on my intervention to say that I am back. She knows perfectly well that I got no further than the Speaker's Chair.

The hon. Gentleman asked how the Bill can simultaneously be important and modest. It is important because it provides some relief, however modest, to the businesses that we represent in rural areas, which desperately need it. It is modest because it does not go nearly far enough, as I made clear in my contributions on Second Reading and in Committee.

Mr. Leigh: That is a fair point; the hon. Gentleman has now explained himself to the House. He has told us why this is an important area of debate and why we need to look at it in depth. There is tremendous suffering and part of the tourism industry, which employs large numbers of people, is not receiving adequate help. The hon. Gentleman made the important point that the measure is too modest, so presumably we could have all sorts of arguments and debates about how to improve the Bill and achieve proper scrutiny to ensure that we deliver more targeted help to businesses that need it.

I have a sneaking suspicion that, although the Bill has modest aims, it deals with a complex and difficult area. It is hard to target help in the right way; it is virtually impossible for the House of Commons to have a serious debate in under two hours and achieve proper scrutiny to ensure that help is properly targeted. We rely on the other place. We have to do so again and again because the Lords do not have a savage guillotine procedure. In this case, however, we know that enormous moral pressure will be put on the other place; Ministers will tell their colleagues in the Lords that the issue is important and the industry is suffering; they will discuss what will happen if they delay the Bill too long and if certain matters are debated. They will say that the Lords have got the expertise, but the Bill could fall.

I do not doubt that, for once, the Bill will be rushed through the other place. Normally, the Lords are good, as they are not bound by party or partisan politics; they are prepared to look at things in a careful and considered way. However, there is a danger that, having received inadequate—indeed, derisory—scrutiny in the Commons tonight, this important Bill will go to the other place and, despite the Lords' best efforts, emerge as flawed legislation.

We must ask ourselves why, when we had so much warning about what was going to be announced this week, it was necessary for the Government to behave as they have. Why do they always have to use their enormous majority as a battering ram and deploy arrogant, overbearing and overweening power to destroy any attempt by the Opposition to debate such matters? All that we are asking for is serious discussion. The Government will get their way today and, in a very short time, the Bill will leave the House of Commons. However, the House will have done itself no credit in the way in which it has discussed those matters.

10.17 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I should like to congratulate the Government on introducing the Bill to alleviate some of the problems affecting our rural constituencies. I have been in the House long enough to remember when our industrial communities were ravaged by the previous Conservative Government, of whom the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) was a member. There was no sympathy at all for the communities that my hon. Friends and I represented.

The Government have responded to issues concerning the nation at large. They have not introduced sectarian or politically vindictive legislation, but something positive. It is a sad tragedy—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is retiring soon but, for the sake of even-handedness, I must tell him that he is going beyond the scope of the programme motion. Those are matters on which, perhaps, he can speak when we get to the Bill itself.

Mr. Rogers: You are perfectly right, Mr. Speaker. I was going on to say that I was grateful that time was being made available. The Opposition complained that the Government were not making time available but, the fact is, we need to have a programme motion so that the Bill can benefit rural constituencies. The Opposition are trying to hold up a Bill that will benefit people in rural constituencies.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rogers: No, the hon. Gentleman has had plenty of time to participate and I am sure that he can do so again later. It is no good the Opposition bleating about the fact that a Labour Government are introducing legislation. We need a programme motion to get that legislation through. If we do not, people in rural constituencies will suffer and those who run stables, shops and small businesses in rural areas will not be able to get any help. It is important that we support the Government's programme motion and congratulate them on what they are doing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Order of 30th April 2001 (Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill (Programme)) shall be varied as follows:—

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Order shall be omitted.

2. Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at today's sitting and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order.

Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill

Not amended, considered.

Clause 3

RATE RELIEF FOR RURAL FOOD SHOPS

10.20 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 3, line 3, leave out "food".

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 3, line 6, leave out "food".

No. 4, in page 3, line 7, leave out from "consisting" to end of line 20 and insert—

'of the provision of essential goods or services to the community in which it is located, such goods or services to be prescribed by the Secretary of State by order'.

No. 5, in title, line 3, leave out "food".

Mr. Green: The purpose of the amendments is consistent with the aim of the Opposition throughout the proceedings on the Bill, which has been to improve it. The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) who, sadly, is no longer in his place, and who has not taken part in any of the previous debates on the Bill, was wrong to say that the Conservative party was seeking to delay the Bill. We have said that we support it in principle. We did not oppose it on Second Reading. We have discussed the efficacy of the Committee stage. Nothing could be more inaccurate than the statement that the Opposition were trying to delay the progress of the Bill.

At every stage through which the House has passed extremely quickly this week, we have consistently sought to improve the Bill. Earlier we heard an interesting debate about whether the Bill was modest or important or both. The truth is that it is both. It is important that some relief goes to businesses, whether farm diversification businesses or village shops, that are suffering as never before under the Government's policies. Equally, it is apparent, not just to those of us on the Opposition Benches, but to the many organisations that represent the bodies that will benefit from the small help given by the Bill, that it goes nothing like far enough. The amendments seek to do what we have sought to do at every stage of the Bill: to give it teeth and to add to the generosity of the benefits that will be given to businesses under the Bill.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): How much?

Mr. Green: The hon. Gentleman, too, has not taken part in any of the previous debates on the Bill. If he will contain himself, he will see what benefits would accrue from the amendments.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Does he believe that he was right to use the word "generosity"? Would not the word "necessity" have been more appropriate?

Mr. Green: I was trying, as ever, with generosity of spirit to be kind to the Government. They may think that

[Mr. Green]

they are being generous to the rural businesses that are suffering so much, but of course that is not the case. They have introduced this rather inadequate Bill and, as we heard, there was a huge delay between First and Second Reading, which is why we are having to go through the various stages of the Bill with indecent haste.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: How much?

Mr. Green: The amendments are designed to improve clause 3 by making it less restrictive. Throughout our proceedings on the Bill, we have tried to improve the parts relating to farm businesses that wish to diversify, and we have tried to extend the Government's restrictive definition of the village shops that will benefit from the small amount of rate relief.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: How much?

Mr. Green: The hon. Gentleman keeps shouting, "How much?" from a sedentary position. If he bothered to read the amendments, he would realise that I am seeking to extend the number and type of shops that would benefit. I am sure that, with his characteristic diligence, he has read the notes from the Library. The Government's proposals entail advantage to the various businesses of £16 million over five years. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) has already observed, that adds up to just over £3 million a year. I am sure that the hon. Member for Workington has assiduously read the *Hansard* of the Second Reading debate, so he will know that the Government's agencies for the countryside say that the tourism industry alone has lost something like £2 billion during the foot and mouth crisis. Indeed, his own constituents have suffered as much as anyone during this dreadful outbreak.

The amendment would remove the unnecessary restrictions imposed by the Government on the type of village store that can receive this modest rate relief. The essential purpose of all four amendments is to widen the definition of "a qualifying food store." Under clause 3, the only stores that can benefit from the rate relief provided in this Bill and in the Local Government Finance Act 1988 which it amends are narrowly defined food stores. The Government have explained why they believe the definition should be so narrow and confined to a store that is "wholly or mainly" involved in selling food. I genuinely believe that they are being unnecessarily restrictive. Without the amendments, the ultimate purpose of the Bill will be partially negated.

It is not a matter of controversy across the House that the underlying point of the Bill and the legislation that it amends, which was passed by the previous Conservative Government, is to help those shops that provide an essential service to village communities, as far too many village shops and services have closed. Successive Governments have sought ways to mitigate the many problems that face such stores, and to find practical solutions that will enable them to carry on in business.

With the amendments, I want to draw back the veil that the Government have placed over this issue. They define these essential services as predominantly food shops. They have said that the underlying purpose of the Bill is to ensure that all the essential services that contribute towards a decent, coherent, civilised society should be as available to those who live in small, rural communities as they are to those who live in large, urban communities. That is a wholly admirable aim. My complaint about the Bill and the reason for these amendments is that, as currently drafted, the Government's definition of a shop does not serve that admirable aim.

The Minister and his right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions have said that they want to avoid loopholes and to prevent shops from slipping in at the edge. They rejected previous amendments in which we sought to replace the word "mainly" with "in part". The Government regarded as ineligible a food shop with 40 per cent. of its turnover from food sales, because they thought that that would be exploiting a loophole.

On Second Reading and in Committee, the Government made it clear that, for reasons which escape me, they have a particular horror of antique shops being included in the definition. It is clear that either the Minister or his right hon. Friend has had a bad experience in an antique shop, because they have a wholly unjustified dislike of them. Regardless of their slightly odd personal prejudices, that is not an adequate basis for policy making by a responsible Government. Much of clause 3 is a characteristically ingenious attempt to plug the various loopholes that the Government say they are extremely anxious to avoid. In Committee, both we and the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) pointed out that a large part of clause 3 was devoted to preventing a shop from installing a microwave oven in which people could heat up meat pies. It seemed to me that, without my amendments, clause 3 was almost more designed to be restrictive than to be permissive. That struck me as being the wrong emphasis in a Bill that sought to help businesses.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does not one of the most peculiar aspects of the clause feature in the proposed new subsection (6CA) in subsection (3)? Line 8 contains the words "excluding confectionery". If there were two sweet shops in the same village, they would not be able to claim rate relief. That strikes me as bizarre, but in villages such as Lacock in my constituency it might well happen.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend has drawn attention to a point raised in another of our Committee debates. As he knows, we engaged in an extensive discussion about why the Government were so anxious to exclude any shop with a microwave oven that could heat up meat pies. We also discussed whether the exclusion of confectionery shops was in any way sensible. The definition of confectionery is not available—I have looked at the original legislation, and it is not there—so the Government will be excluding some shops that may well provide essential services in villages.

I think the Government will regret their action. I think that, if they leave the Bill as it stands, they will not receive even the meagre credit that they perhaps deserve for finally introducing the Bill. There will be villages in which the shop that people regard as their essential store—the shop that they want to keep open, and consider to be a valuable part of village life—cannot stay open, precisely because of the unnecessary restrictions that the Government have included in various parts of clause 3.

Those people will say "Hang on: didn't this Government pass legislation that was supposed to help village stores by allowing them rate relief? Now we find that our village store does not qualify." I cannot believe that that is one of the Minister's purposes; I am sure that he wants the Bill to be as wide-ranging as possible.

The amendments seek to help the Minister achieve what I imagine to be his aim by sweeping away the loopholes—and the restrictions—that the Government have, with unnecessary ingenuity, sought to introduce. They remove the restrictive definition of a food store, and redefine an essential shop, in ways that I shall discuss later. In fact, they serve various purposes. First, and perhaps most important, they are deregulatory. I am sure that those running small village shops and suffering an ever-increasing burden of red tape would welcome a deregulatory alteration in the Bill. Perhaps even more relevant, however, is amendment No. 4, which seeks to be forward-looking in the definition of an essential service.

At present, the Government are stuck in an unfortunate backward-looking mindset. According to clause 3, the only essential village shop is a food shop. No doubt historically food was ultimately the one thing that people looked for in village shops, but, as the Minister will know, what can be provided in local shops, and what needs to be provided as a local service, is changing more rapidly than ever before. My amendments seek to enable the Government to modernise. I use that word deliberately to entice the Minister.

The Minister will know as well as I do that food is an essential service. No one would deny that quality of life in any village is enormously improved by the existence of a food store, but there are many other essential services. In the House and outside, we have had many intense discussions about benefit payments, particularly through electronic means, and how to preserve village post offices. Other members of the Government are, rightly, deeply concerned that those who may not be well enough off to afford a computer, or who may not have easy access to a large town where there are internet cafés or libraries, should have internet access. Those are examples of services that will be as essential as the provision of food. The full range of civilising opportunities that are available to those who live in urban areas should be available to those who live in rural areas. That is at the heart of amendment No. 4.

Of course, that small list cannot be regarded as exhaustive because, in the years ahead, other services will be regarded as being essential to preserving commercial activities in a village. The chief merit of amendment No. 4 is that it does not seek to be prescriptive—to lay down what is an essential service in a village shop. It says that a shop will be eligible if it provides

> "essential goods or services to the community in which it is located, such goods or services to be prescribed by the Secretary of State by order".

The framing of the amendment is deliberate. It is flexible enough to accommodate changing and developing priorities as time goes on. It has been drafted in that way to allow the next Government, who will be elected shortly, the freedom to help to keep a village shop that is offering whatever are the essential services of the day going.

In the past 10 years, all hon. Members have seen enough changes in retailing and enough expansion in the services that we regard as essential to know that it is foolish for the House to set down what those essential services will be. If we have the opportunity to introduce flexibility in legislation, it is sensible to do so. That is why I believe that the amendments that Mr. Speaker has kindly selected improve the Bill.

None of us can know what is the key to keeping people spending money in small rural communities. I make no apology for returning to that point because we are seeking to maintain a commercial infrastructure in small rural communities. We do not know what people in those communities will want to spend money on in future. With the amendment, we do not need to. The House can afford a modest level of extra protection to those village shops without attempting to second-guess the future.

Throughout the stages of the Bill, which has been rushed through so expeditiously, we have attempted to make it more generous. This is the last group of the amendments that the House will discuss. I very much regret that the Government have rejected all our previous suggested improvements, albeit with one or two hints from the Minister that they will consider some of our exceptionally sensible suggestions. Nevertheless, despite the Government's consistent rejection of our proposals, Opposition Members are generous at heart and will continue to rehearse the arguments about how the House can make better laws—a skill that we shall soon be practising full-time.

In that spirit, I commend the amendment to the Minister and the House.

Mr. Gray: I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) on such a comprehensive review of the necessity for the amendments, especially as, from the sound of his voice, he seemed to be suffering just a bit towards the end of his remarks. To carry on in those circumstances seems to be noble beyond the call of duty, and I congratulate him.

I am glad that the amendments in this group have been selected because they go to the heart of what is wrong with the Bill. I do not say that in an unfriendly or ungracious manner. Although the Bill is, as we have said on many occasions, a small and inadequate measure compared with the size of the problem currently facing rural areas, hon. Members representing rural constituencies such as mine very much support the broad thrust of its objectives. Therefore, when I attack the Bill, I do not mean it in an ungenerous sense. I make it plain that we support its broad thrust.

Including the word "food" in clause 3, which deals with village shops and stores, cuts the heart out of what could otherwise be very useful provisions. We are talking about rural villages with fewer than 3,000 people but with more than one non-food store. I thought that, in considering amendment No. 2, it might be useful to consider some precise case studies which I conducted recently in my constituency in the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis.

My constituency has three or four largeish towns, but about 60 villages that are precisely like those described in the Bill and which have been very severely affected by the crisis. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) knows the Cotswolds and perhaps even those 60 villages very well from her time at Cheltenham Ladies college. Then again, perhaps Cheltenham Ladies college does not give its students sufficient away days to discover the area. It is a

[Mr. Gray]

very expensive boarding school and may keep its students in all the time. However, if she had gone for a little trip down the road to my constituency, she would easily have discovered that we have 60 villages across the constituency. However, she must forgive me. If she had not sedentarily doubted my word in that way, I would not have raised the politically embarrassing background that she constantly tries to live down.

As I said, we have 60 villages across my constituency, and they are precisely the type of place that has been affected by the foot and mouth crisis in tourism, especially because of the cancellation of Badminton and all the rest of it. They are precisely the types of places that would benefit from the Bill's provisions.

Immediately after the crisis began, I went round to those villages, taking with me 2,000 copies of a survey asking them exactly how bad they had fared in the aftermath of the foot and mouth crisis. I dished out the survey to pubs, cafes, garages and tourist shops in villages such as Castle Combe, which hon. Members may remember is the very famous village where they filmed "Dr. Doolittle", and Lacock, which is a very picturesque village. They are small villages with only two or three shops, some of which admittedly are antique shops. I have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford that the Government seem to have it in a bit for antique shops.

Although some of the shops sell antiques, most tend primarily to be a combination of the small tourist shop and the classic village shop. Confectionery is very important in that context, as people who go to Lacock, Castle Combe and Corsham like ice creams, for example. I should be interested to hear from the Minister whether ice cream is included in his definition of the word confectionery, which is excluded from the Bill. It seems sad to me that those confectionery shops, into which the tourists flock in Lacock to get their ice creams and sweeties to eat, will be excluded. If the village shop has the temerity to have a microwave to heat up the Cornish pasties so beloved of the tourists, it will be excluded, and that seems wrong to me.

10.45 pm

Before we move on to the detail of the amendments, I shall share with the House the early results of my survey. So far I have only had 200 or 300 returned, but they are from exactly the sort of businesses that we are talking about. The people who replied say that year on year, their income has declined. In four consecutive weeks, first two, then another two, then four, then six, said that their income had declined by 100 per cent. compared with this time last year. Out of perhaps 100 returns so far, the income of about 10 per cent. of the shops had declined by 100 per cent. Others declare varying rates of decline.

A few comments from the survey might be useful. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Pask from the County Stores wrote:

> "Reduction on rates would help".

Mr. Poole of the Wilts Printing Works wrote:

> "Reduced wages for all employees. Closure possible".

Mrs. Tubb, of Tubbjoys Antiques in Wootton Bassett—I am sorry to be awkward by bringing an antique shop into the debate—wrote:

> "Cut back hours . . . Lost one member of staff"

and Mr. Ivory of the Old Dairy Saddlery in Tockenham wrote that he had laid off two people already. Kate Short, of the Blue Door Art Gallery—art galleries would not be covered, either—wrote:

> "Virtually no tourists; no American visitors. The Easter week was particularly terrible."

Richard Bridge described

> "Severe cash flow problems . . . a threat to the survival of the business."

Those are a small sample of many such comments from all over the constituency. I shall ensure that the Minister has sight of the full results of the survey if he is interested, when I have them all in and have collated them. I fear that that may be after the election—so it may well be my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford to whom I will send those results, rather than the present Minister.

The exercise was a fascinating survey of precisely the kind of businesses that would benefit from the Bill. Specifically excluding stores other than food stores rips the whole heart out of the Bill. I am talking about sweet shops and antique shops of all kinds. People drop in and buy a few things, such as a present to take home with them. That sort of purchase is essential in places such as Wootton Bassett, Chippenham, Corsham and Lacock. People pass by, go and see the local tourist site, and then drop into a shop to buy something. That sort of purchase is essential to the people who are really suffering.

Those people were suffering even before the foot and mouth crisis, partly because of the cost of living in that part of the world. Now they are suffering terribly. We are not seeing the Americans, or the other passing tourists. The three big horse events in the area—the Badminton horse trials, which 250,000 people attend every year, the Cheltenham festival, and the Bath and West show—have all been cancelled. Hundreds of thousands of people who would normally have come into my area at about this time of year are not there. The little shops are suffering as a result.

That is why I welcomed the general thrust and purpose of the Bill, and liked the sound of its title when I first heard about it. It is only when one looks at it in more detail—it is a shame that we had less time than we should have had to consider it in Committee yesterday—that one finds that it excludes anything that is not a qualifying food store, and anything that sells confectionery or supplies food in the course of catering. Those seem to me major exceptions that wreck what would otherwise be a perfectly sensible Bill.

The Bill will go to the other place for further consideration tomorrow, and I know that many of the Members there will have stores such as those that I have described very much in mind. I therefore hope that by the time the Bill gets there tomorrow, the Minister will have listened carefully to those considerations and will think carefully about the amendments that my hon. Friends have tabled to clause 3. I hope that he will bear in mind the fact that the proposals in the consultation paper were made before foot and mouth, and although they may well have been reasonable at that time, things were not as bad in those days as they are now.

In the light of the foot and mouth crisis, and the kind of catastrophe that is affecting businesses such as those that I have described in my constituency, I hope that—late as the hour is tonight, and early as it will be tomorrow in the other place—the Minister may yet consider expanding the terms of the Bill so that all the businesses that have been so badly affected by the foot and mouth crisis can be helped by the provisions of this otherwise perfectly reasonable Bill.

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I also support the important amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). It is difficult, in the light of the crisis in the countryside, to see why the rate relief assistance should be confined to food shops. The hon. Gentleman asked who are we to decide what sort of business will be important in the future or which areas may require certain types of business to be viable. For example, a small village by a canal may require a shop selling equipment for boating or fishing. Many villages need a chemist or hardware shop, because those goods are not always available in food shops. Information will be important in the future, and villages will require internet centres. Many other services could be vital. Jobs are also important: for example, a local potter or craftsman may wish to sell his products in a small shop in a village.

I hope that the Minister will seriously consider the amendments, because it seems unnecessary—in view of the small amount of relief that will be provided—to confine the relief to food shops. My village has a shop that sells small items of pine furniture and little items of an antique nature, and that is important to people locally and it keeps jobs in the rural community. I especially support amendment No. 4 and look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth): These four amendments concern the definition of food shops, to which the Bill will extend mandatory rate relief. Amendments Nos. 2, 3 and 5 would delete references to "food" in clause 3 and in the title of the Bill. On their own, they would have no practical effect, because a qualifying store would still be defined by reference to the sale of food. However, that would be altered by amendment No. 4, which would replace the definition of a food shop with a new order-making power to allow mandatory relief to any shop providing essential goods and services, as defined by the Secretary of State by order. That would have the effect of making the introduction of the Bill more complicated.

An order would still be required under the new power to extend mandatory relief to food shops other than the sole general store. As for other essential goods and services, mandatory relief can already be extended to them under the existing order-making powers, which we used recently to cover pubs and petrol stations. The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said that the purpose of his amendments was to improve the Bill but, as with other amendments he tabled in Committee, they would widen the scope of the proposals. The Bill is not intended to provide rate relief to all small businesses. It is intended as a measure to provide relief for shops providing essential food in small rural villages.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) said that there were 60 villages in his constituency. For one tantalising moment, I thought that he was going to give an example of one for which the provisions of the Bill would need to be extended. However, he went on to talk about shops serving the tourist trade, and about antique shops and sweet shops. The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) spoke about internet services, potters and craft shops.

The Government aim to introduce measures to amend rates for all small businesses, and those matters remain to be discussed. Last year's rural White Paper dealt with the matters covered in the Bill, and commitments were made. The Bill allows us to address problems that we know exist in those small villages where the sole general store gets mandatory rate relief. Councils in rural areas feel obliged to extend concessionary rate relief to other food stores in those villages, and the Bill deals with that. It does not extend to non-essential small businesses, no matter how desirable they are.

If the Opposition believe that the Bill should extend wider, they must say how they would pay for that, given that they are committed to a programme of massive public spending cuts. Moreover, the previous Conservative Government introduced the national non-domestic rates system in 1990. Small businesses in rural communities have experienced crises for a long time, but the previous Government did absolutely nothing to help. They did not introduce a measure along the lines of the Bill, or any measure to deal with the problems encountered by sole general stores, pubs and petrol stations. The Conservatives believe the Bill to be inadequate, so why did they do nothing when they were in government?

Mr. Gray: I shall try to ignore the party political polemic into which the Minister has allowed himself to slip. The previous Government did not act in the way that he suggested for the simple reason that there was no foot and mouth disease outbreak during our period in office.

The Minister said that he thought that I had not mentioned any essential store in the countryside that would not be covered by clause 3. It may sound a little foreign to someone representing Coventry, North-East, but the horse industry is essential in my area. I mentioned Mr. Ivory's saddlery in the village of Tockenham, and I could have spoken about a horse supplier in Malmsbury for whom the cancellation of the various events that I mentioned earlier has caused great difficulty. The closure of paths has meant that no hunting is taking place, so businesses in the horse sector are in severe crisis. The Bill does not help them at all.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman's prejudices extend far and wide, from my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) to Coventry. They know no bounds.

The hon. Gentleman suggests that the only reason that the previous Government did nothing was because they did not have a foot and mouth outbreak. What about the numbers of village schools, post offices and essential village shops that closed when the previous Government were in power, during which time they did nothing?

The Bill is not about foot and mouth. The Government have introduced other measures to deal with the problems of foot and mouth, such as hardship rate relief, deferred rate payments and reductions in rateable value to reflect temporary reductions in property values. This measure seeks to underpin essential services for people living in

[Mr. Ainsworth]

small rural communities, and I should have thought that it was in the interests of the Opposition to give it their support and allow it to pass through. To do so, they should withdraw these unnecessary amendments.

11 pm

Mr. Green: The Minister's speech was extraordinary. He started by ignoring the fact that everyone on the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Benches thought that this was a sensible group of amendments. As he ploughed through his speech, he realised that that was an unprofitable road to go down, so he went on to say that the Government did not want to accept the amendment because it was not part of the Bill's original intention. That is fair enough. Of course it was not—that is why the Bill needs to be amended and improved. That is the purpose of amendments.

We are not arguing about why it might be better, as the Minister said, to leave the Bill as it was. The Minister simply referred to the original intention of the Bill and to what was promised in the rural White Paper, but he will recognise that circumstances have changed and worsened radically over the past 12 months since the White Paper's publication. A more generous response may be needed now, even if the Government thought, in good faith, that their response was adequate when they published that White Paper. So that argument was not particularly convincing.

Least convincing of all was the early statement in the Minister's speech, which he returned to at the end, about the purpose of clause 3 and about the reliefs being introduced to help shops that provide essential goods or services. Those are precisely the words used in amendment No. 4. I took them from the phrase that the hon. Gentleman and the Minister for Local Government and the Regions used repeatedly on Second Reading and in Committee. They said that the underlying purpose of the rate reliefs proposed in clause 3 was to help preserve the provision of essential goods and services in rural areas. It seemed to me not incompatible with the Government's aims to insert an amendment that would make that explicit, thus making the scope of the Bill's provisions wider and more generous.

Mr. Leigh: Traditional food shops in small villages have had to diversify. They cannot remain in business simply by selling food. We are really talking about gesture politics. How many village shops in rural areas and small villages will the Bill help? It will not provide the means by which village shops can be saved, because they have already had to diversify.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes the powerful point that sensible and forward-looking village shops are already diversifying. The purpose of the amendments is to highlight that future generations of village shops may be very different animals, providing a different range of essential goods and services—to use the phrase that the Minister used several times.

The provision of essential services should be at the root of what we are trying to do. The purpose of the modest amendments is to enable the Government to achieve what they say are their own ends, but clearly they reject that idea. I sensed that, with characteristic honesty, the Minister accepted that his arguments were not going well because he resorted to cheap, party political polemic, which had been notably absent from our discussions of the Bill at every stage. I took it as a compliment on the standard of the arguments that have been made from those on the Opposition Benches that the Minister could not make any points in argument against what Conservative Members and the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) have said, and had to resort to party political insults.

I very much regret the tone and content of the Minister's response, but we are seeking to make progress with the Bill, so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

11.5 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This is a short but useful Bill. We have had an opportunity to debate its two substantial measures, and the wider issues that they raise, at Second Reading last week, in Committee yesterday, and again today. I am grateful to hon. Members for their co-operation in ensuring the Bill's rapid passage. We all want the benefits that it will bring to rural businesses to be in place as soon as possible.

The Bill will provide help to farmers who wish to diversify, and to village food shops and the communities that they serve. In both cases, it will reduce their costs by cutting their rate bills by at least 50 per cent.

These measures must not be viewed in isolation. They are part of our wider policies to support farming and rural communities. They arise from last year's action plan for farming and the rural White Paper, which are delivering further support to those communities.

The measures in the Bill were originally proposed last year. They are not specifically in response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, but the assistance that they will provide to farmers and to village food shops will now be even more welcome to those rural businesses. I commend the Bill to the House.

11.7 pm

Mr. Green: I am grateful for the Minister's generous words about Opposition Members' co-operation during the Bill's rapid passage through the House. Of course we have co-operated with the measure, because the Conservative party is the party that represents the British countryside and those who live and seek to have their livelihood within it. If there were any last scintilla of doubt attending on that proposition, I would merely point out to the House that throughout this Parliament there has been a group called the Labour rural group of MPs, which claims to be 168 strong, and of those 168 champions of rural Britain, none, as far as my memory serves me, has contributed to our debate over the past couple of hours. That tells us all that we need to know about the attitude of those Labour Members who seek to represent rural constituencies.

As we reach the Bill's final stage in the House, Opposition Members have continued to make what we genuinely believe are constructive suggestions to make the Bill more generous and practical and to widen the scope of its provisions. It would then provide more assistance than the modest amount of help it currently offers.

Given that, in Committee, the Minister and his colleague the Minister for Local Government and the Regions said that several of the suggestions that Conservative Members had made were in principle worth looking at, it is genuinely disappointing that we have not seen a single Government amendment during the course of this week. The Government are aware of the pressure points that we have identified and the improvements that could be made to the Bill.

We in the Opposition have worked very hard. Despite the very fast passage of the Bill—its stages have been taken on successive days—we have tabled amendments at every stage. Given the resources available to the Government, I cannot believe that it would have been beyond their ken to do the same and make some of the improvements that, I suspect, they will realise need to be made. I am not speaking exclusively about the amendments tabled by Conservative Members. We voted in favour of one amendment that was tabled in Committee by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). Sadly, he is no longer in his place, which is a shame because I wish to pay him tribute for moving that extremely sensible amendment. I wish to do so not least because I suspect that it would be a valedictory tribute given that we do not expect him to grace our debates after the general election.

Mr. Gray: When my hon. Friend mistakenly referred to the fact that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) was no longer in his place earlier this evening, the hon. Gentleman reacted with anger and bitterness, saying that my hon. Friend's comments were disgraceful and that he had been here, but was speaking to Mr. Speaker. We now find that the hon. Gentleman has gone home to bed. Is that not disgraceful?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes his point. I have no desire to criticise the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Cotter *rose—*

Mr. Green: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We are getting slightly off the subject, so perhaps it is as well to remind the House that, on Third Reading, we should discuss what is in the Bill, not what is not in it.

Mr. Green: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that guidance. The Bill would have been improved if the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome had been accepted in Committee. I shall happily give way if the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) still wishes to intervene, but I am making no personal criticism of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome; I am simply saying that he will lose his seat to his Conservative opponent.

This small and modest Bill will do some important things, but everyone admits that it is relatively insignificant compared with the scale of the problem that faces those who seek to make and preserve their livelihoods in rural Britain today. As we know, the Bill will introduce 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief for five years for land and buildings that had previously been used for agricultural purposes. The relief will be limited to properties with rateable values of less than £6,000. The Bill will extend the 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief on sole rural shops and post offices, which was introduced by the previous Government, contrary to the slightly wild statements that the Minister made previously. Again, it states that those shops must have a rateable value of not more than £6,000.

I repeat that we support the Bill in principle because it will provide some small help, but there are many problems and criticisms, the bulk of which relate to the Bill's basic details. First, as has been said several times during the debates, the limit on the rateable value of less than £6,000 is inconsistent with the Government's view of small businesses in other parts of the economy.

The Minister made the point in an earlier debate that the relief was supposed not to be general, but targeted on small businesses. Yet it is targeted on businesses with a rateable value of less than £6,000, whereas small businesses are defined in the most recent Green Paper on the subject from the Department of Trade and Industry as those with a rateable value of less than £8,000. Four years on, we are still not being treated to the joined-up government that we were promised.

The DTI and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions evidently take a fundamentally different view of what constitutes a small business. Regrettably, when dealing with the small business sector that faces the worst crisis of any of the crises faced by small businesses—those attempting to survive in rural areas—those in the DETR have chosen a less generous definition of such businesses than their colleagues in the DTI. The Minister will be aware that that is inadequate.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government are responding, in part, to representations made by the Council for the Protection of Rural England that to give such relief to substantial businesses could have deleterious consequences for the environment that we are trying to protect?

Mr. Green: I do not think that is quite what the CPRE said, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point. If he is saying that businesses with a rateable value of £8,000 are big fat cats who do not deserve help, I suspect that he and I would be as one in thinking that view was wrong. Indeed, even if he and I disagreed on that point, he may agree with his colleagues in the DTI who appear to accept it as a definition of a small business. I am happy to take the Government's definition of what constitutes a small business. In Committee, I tabled an amendment that would have substituted £8,000 for £6,000, but it was rejected by Ministers. I was merely trying to make the Government's position more coherent.

Mr. Gray: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) is missing the point? The potentially damaging effects on the environment of bigger businesses in the countryside would be covered by the stringent and rigorous planning regime. Even if one wanted to set up an environmentally

[Mr. Gray]

deleterious business in a converted farm building, one could not do so. The size of the rateable value is thus irrelevant in environmental terms.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is right; environmental considerations should always be at the forefront of our mind when considering business development in rural areas. However, Bills dealing with rate relief, such as this one, should not be the lever for ensuring that appropriate environmental protection is imposed. Such protection is extremely important, but that is why there are planning regulations.

I hope that the Government will take on board the strictures of the National Farmers Union. It made a small number of sensible suggestions for improvements to the Bill—none of which the Government have chosen to take up or even to address. I cannot believe that the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions did not receive the same NFU briefing, so he will be aware that the union is worried about the discretionary element which could lead to "competitive distortion" between local authorities. That is not because one local authority is more generous than another, but because some local authorities have more money available. The problem is genuine and although the means to address it are not necessarily obvious, the Government may well need to do so.

Another problem outlined by the NFU and for which it offered the Minister a solution is the fact that rate relief will be restricted to a maximum of five years, but will start only from the fixed date. Thus, someone who wanted to diversify a farm business three or four years after the commencement order under the Bill will not gain the full rate relief. Such a person might take business decisions based on the amount of rate relief that might theoretically be available, rather than on sensible business criteria. There was widespread agreement that that part of the Bill should be improved as it is likely to lead to problems.

We have held extensive discussions as to whether third parties who rent diversified agricultural land and buildings would benefit—another of the points raised by various of the bodies that have carefully considered the Bill. The Minister for Local Government and the Regions told us firmly that the definition of hereditaments that my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) had obtained from the Library was out of date, and that there was an extant, agreed legal definition—such that third parties who rented out buildings would be eligible for rate relief. We are, of course, happy to accept the Minister's assurance—we are sure that she is extremely well briefed. I only hope that she is right, not least for the sake of the Government's legal bills in years to come.

Also serious is the potential unfairness to existing riding schools. If things go wrong, the Bill might have a genuinely perverse impact on this country's equestrian sector. The Minister for Local Government and the Regions assured my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire that she took on board many of his points about the inadequacy of the Bill as drafted in terms of its effect on the equestrian sector. My fear is that it might damage businesses that are already under pressure. I am sure that everyone on both sides of the House hopes that that will not happen, but it is regrettable that in our proceedings on the Bill we have not improved it so that it can cope with that problem.

The final specific point about the Bill as it stands from which problems might arise is the starting date. The Under-Secretary accepts that the problem of the delays that are inevitable in obtaining planning permission for diversification of farm buildings means that an early commencement date will result in the value of the early months of the rate relief being nugatory for most, if not all businesses, because no one will be able to enjoy the benefits when the delays in planning permission have prevented the businesses from getting started.

The Bill ought to be a lot better than it is, but its contents are better than nothing—extremely lukewarm praise. In terms of effectiveness, the Bill is probably in the top 20 per cent. of Bills introduced by the outgoing Government in that it is, at least, not wholly destructive. On that, I congratulate the Minister. I assure him and the House that when we get the chance, we will introduce our own comprehensive and radical measures that will give better, genuine and more widespread help to farms and other rural businesses.

11.22 pm

Mr. Cotter: It has been said that the Bill is not sufficiently extensive either in its scope or in terms of the rateable value that it covers. My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said, rightly, that the measures it proposes are modest. I am quite sure that he will be in his place in the next Parliament.

As the Minister pointed out, in 18 years the Conservatives did little to support small businesses. Nowadays, they speak at length about small businesses, claim that they are the friends of small businesses and outline all the things that they will do for small businesses given the chance. None the less, the fact remains that although they had 18 years to work for small businesses, they failed to do so. We witnessed numerous bankruptcies and the problems that businesses experienced during the various recessions that they had to endure.

Mr. Green: The Bill amends an Act that was passed in 1988. Who does the hon. Gentleman think was in power when that Act, which introduced rate relief for businesses, was passed?

Mr. Cotter: The hon. Gentleman goes on about how much more should be done, but the Tories had a long time in which they could have done far better.

The Liberal Democrats have a clear scheme: relief for all businesses of less than £25,000 rateable value; and for the first £1,500 of rateable value, small businesses would be entirely let off, which would assist them greatly.

I am worried about the rateable values. The Association of Convenience Stores is clear that the £6,000 threshold is not enough. It believes that the threshold will help only a small number of shops because just a few will be eligible. Although the £9,000 rate for pubs is little higher, it has to take into account the fact that they often have living accommodation. Therefore, the same consideration applies. The organisation representing pub owners has made it clear that a business of that rateable value is almost unviable. There are concerns about the detail.

A little work through the House of Commons Library exposed the fact that the Bill's provisions amount to a modest relief of only £3 million. If the Minister disagrees with that figure, I shall be glad to hear his comments.

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman is right: the Library estimates that £3 million a year and £16 million in total will be spent. How much would the scheme cost if it applied to the rateable value of £25,000, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats?

Mr. Cotter: The total amount spent would greatly relieve small businesses, which is the main consideration. The bill would be met in a neat fashion by adjusting the rates that the bigger concerns pay, which are out of kilter with what the smaller firms pay. Our proposal would cost the Exchequer nothing because we would play one off against the other.

In the spirit of tonight's end-of-term atmosphere, we are, at least, making a step in the right direction, and I hope that more will be taken. The Government said in Committee that, if they have a chance, they will suggest other proposals. We were especially concerned about the five-year limit that has been placed on providing assistance to business, which is a short time. We have to accept—or at least hope—that the Government will address the problem more broadly to cover rateable values for all businesses. I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments.

11.28 pm

Mr. Gray: I want to reiterate a point that has been made, and shall be brief. Although we welcome the ability of farmers to diversify and the provision of help to some village stores, one sector might be badly damaged. We have been losing about 200 to 250 riding schools a year because of the business rates that bear down heavily on them. The Bill allows a farm to diversify. It could decide to run a livery yard, a pony trekking business or a riding stables. That would put the existing riding school at the end of the drive into an unfortunate competitive position. According to the British Horse Society and the Association of British Riding Schools, that could spell disaster for riding schools.

Instead of the 50 per cent. rating outlined in the Bill, all equestrian businesses should be zero rated. Any new or existing horse business should be exempted from business rates. The easiest way to do that is to redefine the horse as an agricultural animal. If a farmer uses a shed for heavy horses, those animals count as agricultural animals and he pays no business rates on the property, but if he uses that shed for breeding any other horse, including a racehorse, he pays business rates. That is absurd.

The Government might also consider exempting new and existing horse businesses from business rates. Only by doing so can they possibly have a hope of saving these businesses. In the United Kingdom, 2.4 million people enjoy riding horses, so it is a very important industry. If the Bill goes through as it stands, it poses the real risk of wrecking those businesses. At the very last moment, on behalf of the horse industry and the people who enjoy riding, I appeal to the Minister to think again about what can be done to correct the Bill so that the industry can be saved.

11.30 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: With the leave of the House, I shall respond briefly to some of the points that have been made.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was right to say that, despite some of the comments that have been made tonight, the Bill's Committee stage was fairly constructive. Plenty of time was available and the debates were not curtailed. We agreed to consider some of the issues that had been raised, and we can do that without delaying the Bill's passage through the House. By allowing it to reach the statute book, we will be able to provide the useful reliefs that are contained in it.

I told the hon. Gentleman that I would consider the issue of commencement, and he also said that he was concerned about the discretionary element of the Bill. It will introduce mandatory relief for small shops in rural villages, and I hope that he is not suggesting that he wants to remove local authorities' ability to provide discretionary relief over and above that provided for by the Bill.

Mr. Green *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman suggests that he does not want to do that.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions gave the hon. Gentleman clear definitions of hereditament, and I assure him that they are correct. He need have no worry about their application.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) and others have tried to suggest that the measures in the Bill are modest. I think that there is wide consensus in the House on the need to encourage, when appropriate, farms businesses to diversify into other sectors. There is a psychological barrier on agricultural businesses crossing the threshold that means that they are subject to rates for the first time. However, the estimates of the cost of the measures in the Bill to help farms to diversify are between £16 million and £96 million, depending on take-up. It is estimated that the measures apply to 3,000 food shops that are not in rural villages with a population of fewer than 3,000, so our proposals are not as modest as some Opposition Members would have us believe.

The hon. Member for Ashford said that, given the opportunity, the Conservatives would introduce comprehensive and radical measures to help small businesses. Although Liberal Democrat Members accused me of engaging in party political polemic when I made the point that talk is cheap, we have read the book about the 18 years that the Conservatives were in office. They will, therefore, have to explain why what they now say about assistance to small businesses is different from what they practised when they were in power. They also have to explain how they would square the circle. When we debate our proposals in the House, they say that they do not go far enough and that more should be spent on this or that sector. However, they are committed to a massive programme of cuts. Their proposals do not add up.

On the small businesses that are not covered by the measures in the Bill, the Green Paper on local government finance proposed rate relief for all small businesses. It is targeted at those with a rateable value of above £6,000, and a taper goes up to a rateable value of £8,000. The Government are committed to considering the issue and legislation will be forthcoming on another occasion.

On this occasion, however, we have the opportunity to pass two useful measures that will help our rural communities and will assist farming businesses to

[Mr. Ainsworth]

diversify into other sectors. I commend the Bill to the House, and I hope that it receives the support of hon. Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

PETITION

Genetically Modified Crops

11.35 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): It is my pleasure to submit to the House a petition from 7,059 residents of west Hertfordshire. The petition states:

> The Petition of residents of West Hertfordshire
>
> Declares that the testing of genetically modified crops in farm-scale trials at Wood Farm, Piccotts End, Hemel Hempstead:
>
> —has not been approved in any local consultation
>
> —will have irreversible effects on the local ecology
>
> —poses potential threats to husbandry and human health.
>
> The Petitioners (7059) therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Minister of State for the Environment to halt these trials and ensure the destruction and safe disposal of these crops.

To lie upon the Table.

Abuse of Planning Controls

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

11.36 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I have applied for this Adjournment debate to draw the attention of the House to the alleged abuse of planning controls at Rother district council in my constituency. I wish to make it clear from the outset that the irregularities to which I shall refer do not arise from any obvious deficiency in planning legislation nor, so far as I can tell, are they the result of maladministration or neglect by council planning staff. The problems that I shall highlight are, allegedly, the result of collusion between so-called property developers and councillors, involving bribery and senior council members having undue influence over their colleagues. I shall argue that those matters should be thoroughly investigated.

This is not the first time in this Parliament that I have shared with the House the results of my research into controversial issues, on which it has become clear to me that answers, explanations and action are needed. I am pleased that, as a result of those earlier debates, positive steps were taken in each instance although, in some cases, more still needs to be done. I can at least claim with some confidence that the topics that I aired in that way were not trivial; I investigated them carefully before referring them to the House.

My most recent attempt to elicit open answers to several related questions was on 30 March, when I introduced the Second Reading of my Bill requiring freemasons elected to public office to register their interest. My speech that day was restricted to a mere 25 minutes or so because of a determined effort by some hon. Members to talk out the preceding business, for whatever motive. In the limited time available, I did not have an opportunity to speak about past links between various London criminals, including the Brinks-Mat bullion gang—Kenneth Noye and his solicitor are both freemasons—and freemasons in East Sussex. Those matters, made known to me by a retired head of the Metropolitan police crime squad, Mr. Brian Boyce, would, I believe, have illuminated my arguments in favour of masonic councillors registering their interests as freemasons.

There is a direct connection between my call for openness on masonic interests and the subject of this debate, as allegations of planning abuse and councillors' impropriety were first raised with me by an elderly freemason, Mr. Eric Johnson, who, for many years, was a distinguished councillor. He advised me that a few fellow freemasons, including one or two councillors, were complicit in a property scam to take advantage of a woman landowner, who is now about 80.

Mr. Johnson alleged that there had been embezzlement, tax fraud, planning abuse and bribery concerning the purchase and sale of land for development at artificial prices. He spoke of inducements paid to a councillor to influence the granting or withholding of planning consent, and allegations of covert payment to a representative of a building firm, Fairclough Homes, by means of which a pension fund of at least £80,000 had secretly been provided.

I then spoke to the elderly landowner, Mrs. Pamela Ward-Jones, who reinforced the allegations. She referred me to her professional advisers, including a solicitor, Mr. Patrick Battersby, a banker, Mr. Graham Carn, and a distinguished chartered surveyor in East Sussex, Mr. Clifford Dann. All these people told me that they had carefully examined a number of property transactions involving on the one hand, Mrs. Ward-Jones, and on the other, a Mr. Ken Jolly and a Mr. Barry Eades.

I understand from reliable professional sources that Mr. Eades is a fugitive from this country, following disputes with the Inland Revenue and also, apparently, with dubious sources of property finance in south London. Mr. Johnson advised me—and other Bexhill residents confirmed—that Jolly and Eades are both freemasons. So was a local councillor alleged in statements given to Mrs. Ward-Jones's solicitors by other constituents to have been paid by Jolly to influence planning decisions. I shall not name this councillor in the House because he would not be able to answer for himself, as he died abroad, I am sorry to say, not long after my inquiries into these matters were made known to the local authority chief executive, the Serious Fraud Office and the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Battersby told me that his client, Mrs. Ward-Jones, claims that Jolly and Eades tried to bankrupt her by procuring that her bank manager refused her credit when she could show adequate means of raising finance. He added the suggestion that Jolly and Eades acted with other parties through whom improper dealings were procured through contacts that they made as freemasons, but he rightly insisted that there was no suggestion that any masonic lodge itself was involved in impropriety. The allegation was merely that individuals involved in the alleged wrongdoing had been drawn together by their common membership of freemasonry.

Among the property sites in which Jolly and Eades became involved improperly, according to Mrs. Ward-Jones, were Willow Way, Top Acre and Curles Farm, but the most controversial planning history seems to relate to land off Spindlewood drive, Cooden, and at Old Harrier Kennels, Maple walk, Cooden. That included some eight acres of land that Mrs. Ward-Jones had provisionally agreed to sell to Bovis Homes for development.

Although the land was not earmarked in a rather outdated local development plan, it was at first approved by council members, and then, after local elections, the approval was reversed, against the recommendation of planning officers. Mrs. Ward-Jones appealed against refusal. Some months later, her appeal was dismissed on the grounds that a much-delayed deposit draft local plan was not in place, and it was therefore not technically possible to earmark fresh areas for development beyond the limits of the old plan.

According to Mr. Clifford Dann, the significance of the Maple walk and Spindlewood drive sites was that when Mrs. Ward-Jones appealed against refusal, a local firm, Freshfield Properties Ltd., acting in concert with Mr. Jolly's company, Buxton Homes, wrote to her suggesting that the elected members of the council who had just refused her permission could be persuaded to do an immediate volte-face.

Mr. Peter Gooch of Freshfield Properties wrote:

> "We believe that a revised planning application to Rother District Council may now be more favourably received. . . To achieve this we need to employ the services of Buxton Homes"—

that is, Mr. Jolly—

> "who have persuaded us in their belief that they can achieve the desired goal . . . in the next few weeks."

Mr. Gooch went on:

> "We would like to proceed with a purchase"—

from Mrs. Ward-Jones—

> "before the date of any appeal hearing. . . The reasons why this planning opportunity has arisen are complicated. . . You do have opponents to your sites on the committee and a fresh approach may be a way of overcoming these difficulties."

On a plan attached to the letter was a note to the effect that the plan would be submitted to the council on the advice of the late councillor who died abroad earlier this year. Mr. Dann asked how it could possibly be in Mrs. Ward-Jones's best interests to sell the land to Mr. Gooch and Mr. Jolly, and challenged them to explain why they believed members of the council would so swiftly contradict the beliefs that had resulted in the recent refusals. No answer was given, and the offer was not taken up by Mrs. Ward-Jones.

As I have already said, I referred these matters to the Serious Fraud Office and the Inland Revenue. The latter has yet to respond to me, but Ms Helen Garlick, a senior advisory lawyer at the SFO, has done so. She said that the SFO tends to deal with cases involving at least £1 million. She doubted whether witnesses could now be found who would be capable of giving admissible evidence of corrupt conduct in a criminal trial. In her opinion, the case was more suitable for determination in a civil court.

Civil proceedings are a matter for Mrs. Ward-Jones and her solicitor to decide on. For the Minister and for the elected members of Rother district council, there is much to review and to investigate further.

The council's planning committee has been chaired since the last election by Councillor Brian Kentfield, a past master of a masonic lodge in Battle and a close colleague of the recently deceased councillor who was the subject of many of the allegations to which I have alluded. If integrity is to be seen to be preserved, it is for Councillor Kentfield to take the initiative and to seek an independent review by someone completely free of connections with freemasonry. Other members of the planning committee have spoken freely of heavy-handed lobbying by senior colleagues over planning decisions put before them. For the sake of Mrs. Ward-Jones, and for the council's good name, these matters should be examined impartially and without further delay.

When Mr. Johnson first drew my attention to these allegations of planning abuse, and the collusion against Mrs. Ward-Jones by what he regarded as a few unscrupulous fellow freemasons, I wrote to Councillor Kentfield and to the local Conservative association, many of whose most senior officers are also councillors, but no explanations were forthcoming. There was only a veil of undisguised animosity at the notion that a wider audience within the party, let alone the public at large, should be made aware of what a few masonic members were doing.

The role of the recently deceased councillor in the local party has now been filled by that councillor's solicitor, who is himself a senior freemason. However, the grand master of Sussex freemasons has written to me assuring me that he will investigate any allegations of wrongdoing among his members. I take him at his word, which I trust he will honour.

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

It is time that the stables were mucked out. It is time for openness and accountability in the public interest. After 18 years in the House, and particularly in light of the recent withdrawal of the Opposition Whip with all the absurdity and hypocrisy that that has implied, I trust that it can be said that I have been my own man and that I have spoken out in what I believe to be the interests of my constituents whenever I have judged it necessary. I hope that in doing so, I have fulfilled my duty in this place.

11.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) has made serious allegations. When we saw that he had succeeded in getting an Adjournment debate on the abuse of planning controls, we tried to speak to his office to see what it was he wanted to raise.

Mr. Wardle: I did not get that message, and I apologise for that. It has always been my practice to help when I can, and I am sorry that there was no reply to the Minister's communication. I saw her sitting on the Front Bench before the debate started, and I wondered whether I should nip over and give her an outline of my concerns. I apologise that she has not had one.

Ms Hughes: No, I have not had one, but I was not criticising the hon. Gentleman. Having heard what he had to say, I wondered whether he deliberately did not want to inform anyone in advance, as the nature of his allegations was very serious. I have some speaking notes about enforcement of planning decisions, planning conditions, section 108 and all the rest of it, none of which is relevant to the points that he has raised. I shall, however, try to make some helpful responses.

The hon. Gentleman made serious allegations about planning abuse and councillors' impropriety. As I think he will agree, he was talking less about abuse of planning controls than about alleged criminal activity, bribes and corruption. He gave details of the circumstances of the allegations, and, indeed, named individuals. I know that, given his experience of raising such matters over many years, he will understand why I cannot comment on such allegations on the Floor of the House.

The hon. Gentleman said that he had talked to the Serious Fraud Office and had been told that for various reasons this was not an appropriate case for the SFO to consider. The complainant has been directed to the civil court. I agree with what the hon. Gentleman seemed to be saying: that does not appear to be a terribly appropriate remedy for someone in such circumstances. The hon. Gentleman did not say whether the allegations had been forwarded to the police, or whether the police had commented. He suggested an independent review by the council. Someone outside the allegations would have to initiate such a move: DETR has no powers or resources to investigate the matter, because the allegations are of criminal activity, corruption and so on, and a Government Department cannot undertake investigations of that nature. I can think of no avenues to explore on the spur of the moment, but if I think of any that have not occurred to the hon. Gentleman, I shall reply to him.

As the hon. Gentleman may know, the Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new ethical framework for local government, setting out a series of principles relating to issues of the kind that concern him—honesty, integrity, propriety, responsibility and so on. Developed from that set of principles is a code of conduct put together by the Government, the Local Government Association and other interested parties. It includes both the code applying to local councillors and the parallel code applying to officers. The code will require councillors to declare membership of organisations, and freemasons are listed as one such organisation. Under the Act, every council will also be required to have a standards committee. It will not be an investigatory committee, but it will be required to ensure that the council concerned has a robust ethical framework; that it is applying, if not the model code of conduct that the Government recommend, its own code based on that model; and that that code is enforced.

There will also be a national standards board, appointments to which I have just completed. The board will be chaired by Anthony Holland, the former chair of the Northern Ireland Parades Commission, who has a robust reputation in the context of such matters. It will have a body of inquiry officers who will undertake investigations of matters such as this—any matters concerning alleged impropriety, dishonesty, wrongdoing or bringing the reputations of councillors or local government into disrepute. It will have power to investigate, to adjudicate and to impose sanctions.

I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman—and the Government strongly agree with him—that this is a time for openness in public life, and for transparency. The vast majority of councillors—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman shares this sentiment—do an excellent job in a spirit of strong public service, and are honest and decent. The minority who behave wrongly and corruptly do a great disservice to the vast majority of upstanding people on our councils. That is why we introduced that framework: not because local government is riddled with corruption—far from it—but to provide a transparent and robust mechanism to protect the representations of the vast majority of decent councillors.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter. I will see whether other avenues are open to the people concerned. I know that the hon. Gentleman is standing down at the forthcoming election and that he is held in high regard for his efforts to bring serious matters to the attention of hon. Members. On behalf of the House, I wish him well for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 10 May 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL *(BY ORDER)*
Order for further consideration, as amended, read.
To be further considered.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Pensioner Incomes

1. **Mr. Eric Joyce** (Falkirk, West): If he will make a statement on the impact of his budget on the incomes of pensioners. [159873]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): As a result of our personal tax and benefit changes in Budgets since 1997, pensioner households will be on average £600 a year better off. The basic pension has increased from April by £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 a week for couples. I can also confirm that we value the winter allowance, the Christmas bonus and free television licences for over-75s and that they will be retained. We will reject options that put at risk the basic pension.

Mr. Joyce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the interests of pensioners in my constituency could only be grossly damaged by the Tories abysmal plans for pensions—

Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question is out of order.

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer really believe that pensioners—people who have lived a very long time—are going to be fooled by a pension increase that he gives them just before a general election? Will not pensioners' enduring memory of this period of office be that they were given a miserly 75p by the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Was that not only one of a series of major gaffes that the Chancellor has made, and is it not the case that he has started this election campaign with a series of gaffes on tax and public spending that have left his economic policy in disarray?

Mr. Brown: What the electors of this country remember is that the right hon. Gentleman was in the Treasury when VAT was put on fuel. Let us consider what has really been happening in the past few years. First, there was the winter allowance, which Conservative Members opposed. Secondly, there were free television licences for the elderly, but Conservative Members opposed them. They also wanted to abolish the Christmas bonus, and they do not want the pension credit.

This morning, the shadow Chancellor said on television, "You are perfectly right that if people choose to take the option to move out of paying into the national insurance fund, there would not be as much money to pay current pensioners. So we have to fill the pump, and we can do that by a variety of ways, but for a start by selling gilt. Some of you will have spotted that if people are moving out of the national insurance fund there will be a hole in it. Yes, that is true."

So now we know that not only do Conservative Members oppose the winter allowance, free television licences, the pension credit and the Christmas bonus, they are putting at risk the very basic state pension by their proposals to allow people to opt out of the basic pension and to privatise it. They would run up massive borrowing and debt. They are not competent on pensions, and they are not competent to run the economy.

Mr. Portillo: No one will believe that nonsense from the Chancellor, but people will remember him as being completely insincere, completely ineffective and completely irresponsible. He is the Chancellor of the Exchequer who was elected to deal with the welfare state, and he was the man who said that he would reform welfare. However, now that the Opposition have made a proposition to make future generations of pensioners much better off and remove the liability on future generations of taxpayers to pay taxes into the future, all he can do is try to make cheap political points.

It is the Conservative party that has the courage to look to the future and the idealism to aspire that future generations of pensioners should be better off. He is the Chancellor of the Exchequer who, by taxing the pension funds and by drawing ever more people into means-tested benefits, has ended up with 700,000 more people living in poverty.

Mr. Brown: It is very interesting that at the last Treasury Question Time of this Parliament, the shadow Chancellor cannot answer the question that has been put to him—*[Interruption.]* This morning, when the shadow Chancellor was asked on television how he would finance the basic pension in future years as a result of proposals that would allow thousands, perhaps millions, of people to opt out of the basic pension, his only answer was, "Well, we would have to discuss that with financiers. It might be bonds. It might be any system."

After four years in opposition, Conservative Members come to the electorate with pension proposals for people to opt out of the national state pension, that would raid the national insurance fund and put pensions at risk for millions of pensioners who are now insecure as a result of those announcements by Conservative Members, yet they cannot tell us how they would fund their proposals.

I will tell the House who the losers are: in Kensington and Chelsea, 12,000 pensioners are benefiting from the rise in the state pension; 13,000 are benefiting from the winter payment; and 6,000 are benefiting from free television licences. The Conservatives cannot be trusted on the economy; they cannot be trusted on tax; and now they cannot be trusted on the basic state pension.

Mr. Portillo: The Chancellor has been peddling this nonsense all morning. Nobody believes him and he might as well give it up as it will not run. In just one respect, however, he was getting near the truth: the next time we meet across the Dispatch Box, I will be answering the questions. I will introduce a novelty to the House in respect of the past four years as I will answer the questions.

In opposition, the Chancellor told us that he would end means testing for elderly people. He has wantonly increased the numbers of people who live in poverty and have to come cap in hand to the state in order to get a living wage and to pay the stealth taxes that he has imposed on them. Our alternative agenda is to allow pensioners to keep more of their money. We will never forget that it is the pensioners money. It is not the Government's money, the Chancellor's money or Gordon Brown's money. It is the people's money and we will allow people to keep more of their own money. We will increase by £2,000 the amount that pensioners can keep before they pay tax. Does not the Chancellor agree that that will be a winning policy with pensioners in this country?

Mr. Brown: What I agree on is that the Conservatives have put in their manifesto a proposal that millions of people could potentially opt out of the basic state pension. That would mean that the national insurance fund would not have the money that was necessary. The Conservative Centre for Policy Studies has calculated that to be £6 billion. The Actuary has calculated it as £6 billion within three years. The question that the Conservatives must now answer is how they will fund the national insurance fund contributions that are necessary for the basic state pension without cutting the basic state pension or running up massive borrowing. When asked this morning whether he could fund the basic state pension, all the shadow Chancellor could say was, "I will have to discuss this matter with financiers. It could be bonds. It might be any system." So Conservative Members, some of whom are making a valedictory appearance, will have to explain—and we will get down to the detail—in every constituency in the country how their opt-out plans can go ahead without raiding the national insurance fund, putting the basic pension at risk or running up massive debts and massive borrowing that would have to be paid for with higher interest rates. Although the shadow Chancellor refuses to answer the question today, and Conservative Members have now fallen silent, they will have to answer that question in each constituency up and down the country.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): May I suggest that my right hon. Friend ignores the rantings of the shadow Chancellor and spends his energy and effort on developing the pension credit? A fully developed earnings-related pension credit could be the future new deal for pensioners in constituencies such as mine.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I applaud the work that he has done during his parliamentary career in support of pensioners and employment in his constituency. He is absolutely right. The Conservatives opposed our plan for the new pension credit. Nor is it supported in their manifesto. They are against the winter allowance and free television licences; they are against the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit and now they propose putting the basic state pension at risk. If that is the Conservative pledge for pensioners, I doubt whether they will want to give it out to pensioners in any constituency.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Why should any pensioner trust this Chancellor when he has just stung elderly people in care homes with a new stealth VAT charge which will cost some of them more than the miserly 75p a week increase in the pension? Will he promise to abolish it? Will he support abolition and will he apologise to all the pensioners who will be stung yet again by his dreadful stealth charges?

Mr. Brown: That is completely incorrect. I would have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would have wished to acknowledge the authorship of the opt-out pension plans. After all, he and others wrote pamphlets in the 1980s saying that people should opt out of the basic state pension. He is now controlling the policy of his Front Benchers from the Back Benches, but he, too, will have to answer to his constituents. Why does he put the basic state pension, the winter allowance and the pensioner credit at risk? Each Conservative Member will have to answer those questions.

Public Investment

2. **Ms Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster, Central): What steps he is taking to increase the proportion of national income spent on public investment. [159874]

4. **Mr. Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): What real terms increases he plans in investment in public services in each of the next three years. [159876]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): When the Government came to power, public sector net investment was equal to 0.5 per cent. of national income. The plans set out in the 2000 spending review will increase net investment to 1.7 per cent. of gross domestic product by 2003-04—a doubling of net public investment. The Government, with our expenditure and investment in health, education, transport and the infrastructure, are turning around 20 years of underinvestment and modernising our public services.

Ms Winterton: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, because increased investment in my constituency means a modernised accident and emergency department, new school buildings and work starting on major transport infrastructure projects. After years of Tory neglect, my constituents know that we need that investment to continue if we are to regenerate the area properly. Can my right hon. Friend give me that commitment and will he also give a high priority to housing investment, so that a hallmark of the next Government will be a decent home for all?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the work that she does on behalf of her constituents. She is absolutely right, and additional investment in housing is included in the public expenditure review. Equally, 68 hospital projects are proceeding as a result of decisions made since 1997, 17,000 schools have been improved and we are recruiting more nurses, teachers, doctors and consultants. That is the way forward to rebuild the public services. The choice at the election will be between those who would invest in the public services and those who would cut investment. Conservative Members will have to go back to their constituencies and explain which hospitals and schools they would cut, which nurses they would make unemployed and which teachers they would make redundant.

Mr. Dobbin: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. The investment so far in the schools and hospitals that serve my constituency has brought definite improvements and is most welcome, but what is needed is a second Labour term in which a sustained radical programme of investment, in partnership with local government and other public bodies, would provide the quality services that the people of this country deserve and demand. Will he guarantee that?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I thank him for the work that he does. Education expenditure is rising by £4 billion a year and it will continue to rise by £4 billion a year under our spending plans. Equally, health service expenditure is rising by £5 billion a year. It is rising from £49 billion to £54 billion to £58 billion to £64 billion. When have the Conservatives ever been able to talk about measures of investment as good as those and on a sustainable basis? I know that the choice in the coming campaign will be between more investment under this party and cuts in investment under the Conservatives.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Would the Chancellor advise voters to take more account of his plans for public spending or more account of his record? Will he for once admit that his record on public spending is as bad as that of the Conservatives, with average spending on health and education in this Parliament lower as a proportion of national income, not higher? Will he also admit that even at the end of the current spending review, Labour will spend less in 2003-04 as a proportion of national income than the Tories did in 15 out of those dreadful 18 years?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman asked me to talk about my record as well as my ambitions. Schools capital will have risen from the £600 million we inherited to £3.2 billion. Some 17,000 schools are benefiting from modernisation. In individual schools, an extra £3,200 brings the total amount paid to many primary school head teachers to £9,750. A typical secondary school head teacher can get up to £115,000 for the school.

That is what we have done already, but in addition we plan to make available an extra £4 billion every year. I remind the hon. Gentleman, now that we are considering the past as well as the present and future, that the Government introduced a windfall tax on the utilities when we came to power. More than £1 billion of that money has gone to schools, but the Liberal Democrat party opposed the windfall tax. Will he say whether he still opposes it, as that is money that has gone to schools and education?

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Has the Chancellor noted that the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission have both publicly warned him that his public expenditure plans are unsustainable, that they are incompatible with the European stability pact to which he unwisely signed up, and that they must inevitably lead to both inflation and higher taxes?

Mr. Brown: First, the stability pact that the hon. Gentleman finds so unacceptable was signed not by me, but by the previous Conservative Government. Secondly, he puts himself into a difficult position given his history as an ally of the European Commission. I will tell him what I told the Commission, which is that we will stick to our spending plans. They are the right spending plans for this country, and mean more hospitals, schools, teachers and doctors. They are what the people of this country want. The choice is between investing more under a Labour Government and major cuts in investment under a Conservative Government. The hon. Gentleman no doubt supports those cuts, but the Conservative party will have to explain them.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): First, I thank my right hon. Friend for putting extra public investment into housing, which was desperately needed after the previous Conservative Government slashed billions of pounds off housing investment. Will he commit to putting further investment into housing over the next four years to ensure that the homeless have a hope of a home, and that council tenants can enjoy security and investment in their homes? Does he agree that the Government's investment pledges are in sharp contrast to what the Opposition propose? The previous Conservative Government slashed investment in housing, and in their dying days removed the safety net for the homeless. More recently, the Opposition have blocked the Homes Bill, thus preventing further hope for the homeless. They now plan to sell council homes over the heads of their tenants, who will have no choice in the matter.

Mr. Brown: As always, my hon. Friend puts her constituents case very well. We will continue our spending plans on housing, health and education, because they are right for her constituents and for the constituents of every Member of Parliament. People will look at the Conservative plans for spending cuts, but they will also see that huge additional spending commitments have been slipped into the Conservative manifesto. They include family scholarship schemes, progress centres outside schools, a cops-in-shops initiative, secure training centres—*[Interruption.]* Tory Members are now cheering public expenditure.

The problem for Conservative Members is that they will have to explain why none of their figures add up. They have made tax promises that are way in excess of what the country can afford. They say that they will cut spending, but are unable to deliver. Then, to please different sections of the electorate, they make spending commitments that they cannot afford. There are so many people on the Conservative bandwagon that there is not enough room left for the band.

Married Couples Allowance

3. **Mr. Tony Baldry** (Banbury): How many people have been affected by the abolition of the married couples allowance. [159875]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): We are replacing the married couples allowance with the children's tax credit as part of a package of measures to focus resources on families with children. The children's tax credit is worth over twice as much as the married couples allowance and will benefit about 5 million families.

Mr. Baldry: I declare an interest in the answer to this question, as I am getting married in 15 days. Does the Paymaster General accept that the abolition of the married couples allowance was in effect a stealth tax on marriage, and that about 5 million couples who benefited from the allowance do not benefit from the child tax credit system? Does she also agree that 1 million of those who could benefit from the child tax credit system do not, and will not, because they have not applied for it? As a result, 6 million families are worse off. Would not it be much more straightforward to reintroduce a married couples allowance that would benefit all families with children under 11 years of age? I am glad to say that that will not include me.

Dawn Primarolo: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his marriage in 15 days' time. I am sure that he would accept that he is not in need of any financial encouragement to get married and does not believe that he would have benefited from the married couples allowance.

The resources used for the married couples allowance were paid regardless of marital status. The allowance was paid to single parents, divorcees and couples. The Government have focused those resources on supporting families with children. Some 85 per cent. of those who are entitled to receive the £520 a year through the children's tax credit have applied for it. I am sure that after the hon. Gentleman's wedding, he will join the Government in campaigning to ensure that the remaining 15 per cent. receive that money as well.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I served on several Finance Bills during the previous Parliament, in which the Conservatives cut and cut the married couples allowance without any compensating action for families. Is it not the case that the majority of people welcome the Government's focus on child poverty, and that they welcome not only the children's tax credit but the record increase in child benefit, the working families tax credit and child care tax credits, which have benefited families more than twice over, as my hon. Friend has said?

Dawn Primarolo: I understand that this will be my hon. Friend's last appearance in this House as he takes up his full duties in the Scottish Parliament. His campaigning for the Government to tackle child poverty is well known. He has made a substantial contribution to the development of the policies on the working families tax credit, the increase in child benefit and the increase in income support levels. Those policies have ensured that the Government have already lifted 1.2 million children out of poverty, and intend in the next Parliament to lift another 1 million children out of poverty.

Pensioners (Taxation)

5. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): What plans he has to review the taxation of pensioners. [159878]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): As a result of our policies, seven out of 10 pensioners pay no tax or pay tax only at the 10p rate. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, following our personal tax and benefit changes, pensioner households will be £600 a year better off on average since 1997.

Mr. Bercow: Given that the savings ratio has fallen to its lowest level since 1963, that millions of pensioners face billions of pounds worth of extra taxes, and that half of all pensioners are set to be on means-tested benefits by 2003, why does the right hon. Gentleman not increase the age-related personal allowance by £2,000 and take 1 million pensioners out of tax altogether? Those are Conservative policies to help people who work hard, who save hard, who try to be independent of the state and who believe in this country.

Mr. Smith: We are helping all pensioners with the increase in the basic state pension and the introduction of the minimum income guarantee, giving greatest help to the poorest pensioners. We introduced the winter allowance, which Conservative Members opposed and would abolish. We will not adopt their proposals because they would do nothing to help the majority of pensioners. The distribution effects show that more than 90 per cent. of the benefit goes to the richest third of pensioners in the country, confirming yet again that the Conservatives stand for the few whereas we stand for the many.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The pensioners in my constituency who face the greatest difficulties are those who were badly affected by the scandalous collapse of Chester Street Holdings and who suffer from asbestos-related diseases. As this is the last Treasury Question Time before the election, does my right hon. Friend have any news for those people?

Mr. Smith: I shall be setting out details in a written answer shortly, but I am delighted to confirm to my hon. Friend that we have reached agreement with the insurance industry that the claims of Chester Street victims will be met by the industry using appropriate policyholder protection schemes. I am grateful for the flexibility shown by the insurance industry in helping to cut through what was an extremely complex legal situation. I congratulate my hon. Friend and other hon. Friends on their campaign, which has ended the uncertainty that was hanging over the victims and their families.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I do something that is extremely relevant at Question Time? On this occasion, I thank the Minister for that reply to the question from his hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). I, too, have campaigned with Members on both sides of the House to obtain justice for those who are dying from asbestos-related diseases—in particular, my constituent, Mr. Donald McCreery, who has only a few months to live. The announcement, in the dying hours of this Parliament, will bring great happiness to him and his family. I thank the Minister and the Government for the work that they and Back Benchers have done to bring about justice. Surely, that is what the House is about.

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generous remarks. As he says, there was an all-party commitment to resolve the matter. I am only too pleased that, as he says, in the dying hours of this Parliament we have been able to achieve that security and justice for people suffering from terrible diseases, who, with their families, would otherwise have been left in unendurable anxiety. I am pleased that they can look forward to the compensation to which they are entitled.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): The 13,240 pensioners in my constituency are extremely grateful for the extra income that they have received under the Labour Government after 18 very hard Tory years. Will my right hon. Friend give wide publicity to his plans for the pensioners tax credit, which will reward those pensioners who have been thrifty and saved hard all their lives?

Mr. Smith: Yes, my hon. Friend can look forward to extensive publicity promoting the benefits of the pensioners tax credit during the coming weeks and, thereafter, along with the other extra help that we have given pensioners, which is ensuring real increases in their living standards and real investment in the services on which they depend.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Does the Minister recognise that pensioners feel worse off under Labour? They resent the indignities of the means test, and they want to decide for themselves how their pension is invested. In the circumstances, will he support our policy of cutting tax on pensioners, of cutting tax on hard-earned savings and of reforming the annuities rule? In short, is not the best advice that he could give pensioners for the next election: vote Conservative?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman was cranking up the spending commitments like nothing on earth. However, the truth is that the Conservatives cannot pay for their proposals because they cannot identify the savings on which they claim those proposals depend. Their proposals would leave a black hole in the national insurance fund. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor pointed out, the shadow Chancellor—when challenged this morning about where he would find the money—could say only that he would talk to financiers, that it might be bonds or that it might be any other system. What it certainly would be is borrowing, which would destabilise the economy, push up interest rates, cut real living standards for everybody and hit pensioners worst of all.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will my right hon. Friend give a commitment today that the winter fuel allowance and free television licence for those aged 75 and over will remain tax-free? Can he explain why, before the Government took office, not a single penny was given to pensioners for heating, whereas under the present Government such assistance was given from the beginning?

Mr. Smith: I congratulate my hon. Friend and thank him for the work that he did on the campaign on television licences. The answer to his question is yes, we can guarantee that those will be free of tax and, yes, it is true that when the Conservative party was in government it did nothing to help pensioners in those ways. That summarises clearly the difference between the parties and the choice facing the people in the general election. We are standing up for pensioners' interests, keeping our promises and delivering rising living standards and better services, but all that would be at risk under the Conservatives.

Economic and Monetary Union

7. **Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): When he expects that his five economic tests for British participation in EMU will be fulfilled. [159881]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The Government's position on the five economic tests for the euro was set out in a 1997 statement to the House. The Government have said that the assessment will be made early in the next Parliament, so that British business is prepared for the introduction of euro notes and coins in 2002 in the euro area. I am today in consultation with business, publishing additional case studies showing how British businesses across a range of sectors have prepared for the introduction of the euro, thus helping British business to compete effectively in the single market, whether we are in or out of the euro.

Mr. Paterson: Last week, the Chancellor got into the most terrible huff when the European Commission criticised his conduct of the economy. We all know from the Gould memo and from indiscretions on television that the Prime Minister wants to bundle us into the euro, against the wishes of the British people. As that will reduce the role of the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom to that of office boy for the European Commission, will he now go through each of the five tests and give his interpretation of where we stand today?

Mr. Brown: The Government's position is as set out on previous occasions. While we see the benefits in principle of the single currency, we shall subject it to five economic tests, which will be rigorously made early in the next Parliament. If we were to recommend that we join the single currency, we would report to Parliament, and then the people of this country would have the final say.

The difference between our two parties is that we are prepared to say that we support the single currency in principle, but will subject it to tests. The Conservative party cannot tell us whether it supports it in principle or is against it in principle. Indeed, some of those in the Conservative party support it in principle and some are against in principle. During the election campaign, they will have to make up their mind.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): When my right hon. Friend comes to consider the five economic tests, particularly the question of whether the British economy is converging with that of the euro area, will he take into account the effect of enlargement on the economy of the euro area, and specifically the possible effect of enlargement on the value of the single currency?

Mr. Brown: All matters that are relevant will be taken into account in making the assessment, and we shall consider the effects on investment, employment and financial services. We shall consider whether we have the flexibility and we shall consider whether there is sustainable convergence. Those are the economic tests for Britain.

What the country will not support is a Conservative party that appears to want to rule out a single currency on grounds of dogma and is not prepared to examine what is in the national economic interest. I believe that, at the end of the day, people will want this decision to be taken on the basis of the national economic interest. By refusing even to support preparations by business, the Conservative party is not only the anti-European party in this country but the anti-business party.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In advocating the single currency, will the Chancellor make sure to remind the British people that every time that we have been on fixed exchange rates, unemployment has increased astronomically? Will he also tell the British public that the choice of rate at which we would join the single currency is not left to this country to decide, because under article 109 of the treaty it has to be decided in conjunction with other countries? In other words, we cannot pick a rate to suit this country and the economy of this country.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman's problem is that while he appears to be subjecting the single currency to the tests of employment and everything else, he has ruled out the single currency as a matter of dogma. His position is not to support it if the economic tests are met but to oppose it under all circumstances.

The Conservative party will have to make up its mind. The shadow Chancellor told Welsh Conservatives on one occasion that his policy was to keep our options open on EMU. He also said that a single currency would mean giving up the government of the UK. The Conservative party must make up its mind in this campaign. Is it against a single currency in principle, and therefore for ever, or against it only for one Parliament?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one reason why he is in a position to tell the Commission and anybody else, including the International Monetary Fund, to get stuffed is that we now have the most successful economy in all my 31 years as a Member of Parliament? When the election is fought, one thing will be certain: we shall not need any lectures from people who were experts in building deficits. This Government have managed not only to wipe out the debt left by the Tories, but to create a successful economy, which will provide more money for the health service, more money for schools and more money for the welfare state. I look forward in the next four or five years to more redistribution of wealth from the rich, who are represented by the Tories, to the many, who are represented on the Labour Benches.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and thank him for his campaigning, particularly on behalf of pensioners.

Any Conservative party claims to economic competence have been undermined not only by what it did in government, but, today, by a manifesto that is unaffordable and not properly costed. When it comes to the campaign, the deputy Director General of the CBI has said that the Tory party's more eurosceptic view is not one that most CBI members would feel comfortable with, and that it is not in our commercial interest to have a eurosceptic Government. He also said that the CBI was once considered the corporate arm of the Tory party, but that most businesses would take their hat off to this Government for getting Britain's message across better. In other words, the Conservative party is not just the anti-euro party but, indeed, the anti-business party.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Given the Chancellor's objections to and embarrassment at receiving orders from Brussels to cut his overspending plans, why does he continue with the silly pretence that a Labour Government's decision to join the euro would be based on objective economic criteria? The country well knows that the issue is a fundamental constitutional one, not least whether Britain should retain the ability to manage its own economy.

Mr. Brown: That really sums it up. I asked whether the Conservatives are against the single currency on principle or owing to the national economic interest. The hon. Gentleman has now proved that he is against the European Union altogether. It is hardly surprising that he had to apologise for calling for a renegotiation of our membership of the European Union. At this election, as I have seen from the Conservative party's manifesto issued this morning, it is against not only a single currency and helping business prepare for its introduction, but the treaty of Nice and single majority voting—and the hon. Gentleman is against the EU altogether. It is no wonder that businesses oppose the Conservative party.

Community Sports Clubs

9. **Mr. Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): When he will introduce VAT relief for community sports clubs. [159885]

11. **Mr. Andrew Reed** (Loughborough): What estimate he has made of the benefit to community and amateur sports clubs of his Budget proposals for tax relief. [159888]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Government announced in the 2001 Budget their intention to consult on possible support through the tax system for community amateur sports clubs, which we recognise play a positive role in promoting health and cohesion in their communities. We intend over coming months to consult key organisations from the sports and voluntary sector, and to draw up a detailed proposal, which will be published for final consultation this year before the Government take it forward.

Mr. White: I thank my hon. Friend for that response, but will she take into account during the consultation the fact that many clubs have had to take up the slack as a result of the Tories flogging off school playing fields, and have had to spend more on providing sports facilities for young people?

Dawn Primarolo: The answer is yes. That issue will be taken into account, because we recognise the valuable contribution that such organisations make.

Mr. Reed: I am delighted that the Government have taken up my ten-minute Bill and I hope that, as soon as possible, I shall be able to see it proceed through its final stages in the next Parliament.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it is vital for sports clubs to benefit from the relief because they offer young people the opportunity to participate? The issue is not just about sport; it is about health, education and crime. The proposal is a prime example of joined-up thinking. It will ensure that people benefit from Government policy and shows the important role that sport plays.

Dawn Primarolo: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his ten-minute Bill and on his ability to influence the Government and to represent his constituents so well in the House—long may that continue. He will know that the Treasury and Customs and Excise are working with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for precisely the reasons that he identified. Unfortunately, this is a complicated area of the tax system because of the various structures of sports clubs. However, we intend to take the measure forward and I hope that, when he sees the final proposals, he will be encouraged to continue to press the Government on such matters.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Does the Paymaster General not understand that hundreds of thousands of pensioners will take a dim view if the Government extend relief for VAT to community sports clubs at the same time as they impose a new stealth tax of VAT on pensioners living in care homes? The Chancellor is so ashamed of that stealth tax that he would not reply to the question that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) asked about it.

Dawn Primarolo: It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman seems to be declaring that the Conservative party will oppose the Government when we introduce any reliefs for community and amateur sports clubs. On his allegation about VAT changes with regard to pensioners, I point out that there are no VAT changes—and I hope that he heard that. There will be no change in the proposals that are currently operational with regard to these services.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): Although the Paymaster General's announcement is to be welcomed, does she agree that there is still a long way to go before the Government put back into sport and community organisations the large amount of tax that they take from them?

Dawn Primarolo: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Government have a fine record in supporting sports and community activities. The review that was carried out on the taxation of charities showed our commitment to supporting voluntary and charitable organisations. Clearly, the review of reliefs for amateur sports and community clubs adds to the contribution. He was quite wrong in his assertion.

Employment (Budget Measures)

10. **Mr. Ernie Ross** (Dundee, West): What assessment he has made of the impact of his Budget measures on employment; and if he will make a statement. [159886]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): Thanks to the tough choices and the platform of economic stability that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budgets have put in place, we have the lowest unemployment for a quarter of a century and 1 million more people in jobs.

Mr. Ross: Does my right hon. Friend accept that people in Scotland particularly welcome the successive Budgets introduced under our Government? Because of those Budgets, 31,500 people have found work through the new deal, 120,000 have benefited from the minimum wage and the working families tax credit is helping 108,000 families to make work pay. Does he agree that the Government's economic strategy goes hand in hand with our social policy agenda, which is tackling poverty? Does he also agree that, while jobs are good for individuals and the country, having a job is also the best way out of poverty?

Mr. Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is right at the heart of the Government's purpose to ally the economic conditions for growth and job generation with the opportunities and the help that people need to take advantage of those chances. We extend a hand up to those in the weakest position.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on his work in chairing the all-party poverty group and on the energetic and close support that he has given the new deal from its inception. Throughout the United Kingdom, the new deal has helped more than 290,000 young people off benefits and into jobs and more than 66,000 of the long-term unemployed have been helped to move from welfare to work. The promises that we made at the last general election have been kept, and we shall build on them in the future.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Minister accept that since the Budget thousands of people have lost their jobs as a consequence of foot and mouth hitting both agriculture-related services and, in particular, tourism?

In that context, will the Government consider—even at this late stage of a Parliament—extending an interest-free loan system to help those firms that are in danger of going out of business, and introducing a grant system to help to relaunch businesses that might otherwise find that difficult to do?

Mr. Smith: We are very mindful of the acute difficulties that are being caused by the impact of foot and mouth disease, especially in rural communities. Help is being provided by the rural taskforce and other Government measures, such as the extra resources that we are giving to the small firms loan guarantee scheme and the extension of business relief. Moreover, we are deferring national insurance, income tax and value added tax payments, which gives tens of millions of pounds of help to hard-pressed businesses. As a result of consultations with the taskforce and others, the Government will continue closely to monitor the situation and consider the evidence to determine where further help is needed. The best thing that we can do is to get the footpaths and parks open—where it is proper and safe to do so—and the tourists back into our rural communities.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Will my right hon. Friend accept that all Labour Members celebrate the fact that we have achieved the lowest unemployment figures for 25 years? May I also welcome the Chancellor's commitment to achieving full employment in every region? Will his concept of full employment include bringing back into the labour market disabled people, lone parents and people over 55?

Mr. Smith: Again, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his commitment to successful welfare-to-work policies, not only in his constituency, but across the country, and on the distinguished contribution that he makes in chairing the Employment Sub-Committee. Our commitment to full employment is about extending opportunities to disabled people, lone parents and others who have been cut out in the past. That is why we have the disabled persons tax credit, the new deal for disabled people and the new deal for lone parents. Each measure helps thousands of people to move from dependency to greater independence as part of the provision of opportunities for all, for which the Labour party and the Government stand.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that his reply to the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) was pitifully inadequate? Does he not realise that there is great deprivation in rural areas as a consequence of foot and mouth disease? The measly measures that the Government have offered to try to meet the dire problem are absolutely inadequate. Will he address the issue, from his position of urban ignorance, and seek to do something about it?

Mr. Smith: That was an unworthy remark from the hon. Gentleman. We have been energetic in introducing help where help is needed. I have received letters of appreciation for the help that the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise have given in deferring tax obligations. We have also extended extra help through the small firms loan guarantee scheme, and provided another £24 million just last week through the regional development agencies. In addition, the rural taskforce will continue its work during the general election, in consultation with all interested and affected parties, to ensure that we get our rural communities back to normal and to their former levels of prosperity and economic activity, to which we should all be committed. Those communities can draw scant comfort or help from the Conservatives, who want to cut public expenditure even when their Back Benchers say that they want more of it.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that £6 billion pays for 30,000 nurses and 75,000 doctors, and provides minimum income guarantee payments for 2 million of our poorest pensioners? If he found a black hole in his budget, would he have the gall to explain to those people exactly what that meant? Would he be confident that he would get away with his life, given such wonky arithmetic?

Mr. Smith: It will not have escaped my hon. Friend's attention that the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer has left the Chamber already. Perhaps he has left to speak to financiers to learn how he will plug the black hole in his funding. My hon. Friend is right: the Conservative party's prospectus threatens jobs, public services, living standards and investments. The electorate will not forgive Conservatives for putting forward such incompetent plans. Conservatives cannot show how they would be paid for, and they would put at risk economic stability and the social justice that the Government are providing.

Debt Management Office

12. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): If he will make a statement on the work of the Debt Management Office. [159889]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The Debt Management Office supports the Government's policies of minimising debt financing costs over the long term, taking account of risk and managing the cash needs of the Exchequer in the most cost-effective way.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank the Minister for that answer. The management of the Debt Management Office is a vital part of managing the economy. Now that the Institute of Fiscal Studies has identified a massive gap of £5 billion a year by 2004, will the Labour party cut its disastrously unsustainable expenditure plans, will it disastrously increase taxation or will it unsustainably increase debt? To fill the gap, should the British people mind the gap and vote Conservative at the election?

Mr. Smith: That was an extraordinary question for the hon. Gentleman to ask. In the year before the last general election, the Conservatives ran up borrowing of £28 billion. In the year before the impending election, we have a net repayment of £15 billion. The DMO is operating within a very different environment, in which the Government have sound public finances and sound money, as opposed to the spendthrift millstone of debt that the Conservatives put round our necks, and would do so again if they had the chance.

As for the performance of the DMO, the hon. Gentleman would have done well to read the Select Committee report that was published in May 2000, which stated:

> "We were pleased to note that several witnesses who have regular contacts with the DMO, particularly in relation to debt management, praised the agency's performance and transparency."

There is a better financial situation that is being better managed with Labour.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Are not the general public entitled to one more statistic? How many thousands of millions of pounds of Government debt that we inherited from the previous Tory Government have the Labour Government paid off since 1997?

Mr. Smith: First, I thank my hon. Friend for his distinguished service and contribution to the House—[Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."]—which he will notice is applauded on both sides of the Chamber. I thank him also for the principled, energetic, good-natured, friendly and supportive way in which he goes about his work, which was reflected in his question. The answer is that we are reducing debt from the 44 per cent. of gross domestic product under the Conservative Government to 31 per cent., and a sustainable 30 per cent. for the years ahead.

Those are not merely statistics. The numbers reflect the money that is taken from working people's pockets. It was taken in the past to pay for the boom-and-bust instability of a Conservative Government, who ran up debts because they could not manage the economy effectively. In the coming weeks, our case will be built on the tough decisions that we have taken and the platform of stability that we have put in place. We can invest and grow, and generate further jobs for the future. All that would be at risk with the Conservatives.

Poor Families (Tax)

13. **Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): If he will make a statement on the tax burden on poorer families. [159890]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): By October 2001, as a result of the personal tax and benefit measures introduced over the Parliament, families with children in the least well-off fifth of the population will, on average, be £1,700 a year better off in real terms.

Mr. St. Aubyn: According to the Government's own figures, since they came to office the poorest fifth of households have had their tax burden increased by 12 per cent. Do the Government recognise that running a car is a necessity for many of even the poorest families, particularly in rural areas? They have introduced a regressive tax—there has been a massive increase in car taxation. Will the Minister join the Conservative party in cutting tax on petrol by 28p a gallon?

Mr. Timms: No, less well-off families are much better off, as independent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows. Of course, the data to which the hon. Gentleman referred include only about a quarter of a year's worth of working families tax credit data and do not include subsequent increases in income support child credits and other improvements. He needs to explain to his constituents the fact that our measures will have taken 1.2 million children out of poverty during the course of this Parliament. There have been huge improvements, particularly for the least well-off families.

Points of Order

12.31 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. First, I hope that you enjoy the Dissolution, as I suspect that there will not be a candidate fighting against you. I was wondering whether the Health Secretary has said that he will come and make a statement about the future of the Victoria hospital in Lichfield, which faces closure; or, failing that, whether the Home Secretary has decided to come along and make a statement about the fact that we have lost 240 or more patrol police officers in Staffordshire since 1997; or, failing that, whether there has been a statement from other Secretaries of State, including the Chancellor—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that I can assist the hon. Gentleman. The answer is no in every case.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether an opportunity can be found today or tomorrow for the Paymaster General to return to the House to correct a misleading impression that she may have given inadvertently during Treasury questions. When I asked about the Government's proposal to impose VAT on service charges in care homes and sheltered accommodation—a matter raised earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—she claimed that there was no such proposal. In fact, Customs and Excise propose to change the interpretation of Government rules, the effect of which will be to impose a new stealth tax on pensioners. At least the Chancellor was too ashamed to answer my right hon. Friend's question.

Mr. Speaker: Let me answer. What the hon. Gentleman should do is put his case in writing to the hon. Lady. That is the best way to do it.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am still waiting for answers to written questions that I tabled some time ago. I am waiting for two answers to questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer that I tabled on 20 April, and I am waiting for one answer to a question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that I tabled on 6 April. We are now in the dying hours of this Parliament. What action can you take, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that I get responses to those questions before Dissolution on Monday?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has put his problem on the record and I am sure that the Ministers will note what he has said.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. A number of colleagues are in a similar position to my hon. Friend. Would you be kind enough, to contact Government Departments and ask for all ministerial replies to be given before Dissolution? That is something that you could do on behalf of Back Benchers, that would be appreciated by Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, questions die when we come to Dissolution. However, I will encourage Ministers to answer parliamentary questions tabled by Back Benchers. I will do that, and I thank the hon. Gentlemen for raising the matter.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If possible, will you extend that help? As you may know, there have been many complaints from both sides of the House about the great slowness in dealing with parliamentary correspondence, some Departments being much worse than others. Is it within your remit, to direct from the Chair that you expect Members of Parliament to receive, before Parliament is dissolved or shortly thereafter, the backlog of replies that are due on behalf of many of our constituents?

Mr. Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have a constituency, just as he does. Constituents write to me and I write to Ministers, and there are times when I am frustrated by the lack of replies and the time that it takes them to reply. I take on board what he says, and I hope that Ministers take note.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Your replies to the points of order have been extremely helpful. May I take the matter one stage further? You rightly pointed out that Departments can no longer reply to questions once the House has dissolved, but that does not mean that Departments of State cannot deal with questions by way of correspondence to let hon. Members have a reply, albeit in a different way. Could you ensure that Departments of State reply by letter to questions that cannot be dealt with before the Dissolution?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot do that, but correspondence can be answered after Dissolution. There is nothing to stop the hon. Gentleman writing and saying, "Please reply to my question in writing. I should be obliged if the Minister would do that." However, there is nothing that I can do about that.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not somewhat strange that Conservative Members want a different situation from that which pertained in 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997? Your answers have been extremely helpful, but we did not get such co-operation from Ministers at the time of those elections.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman and I have been in the House a long time. Many of the Ministers during the period to which he refers were very good at replying to correspondence. I appreciated the replies that some of those Ministers gave to a Back Bencher like myself in those days.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When the House becomes noisy during exchanges at Question Time, many of us rely on the amplification equipment to hear what is said. I wonder whether, in the period between now and the election, the amplification equipment on the Government side could be checked. During questions to the Chancellor, I distinctly heard requests being made for him to deal with questions about whether taxes would rise to sustain his spending plans. However, the Chancellor did not seem to hear that question and no reply was given.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps we will hear the reply after the election.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has the Secretary of State for Health notified you that he intends to come to the House in the last few hours of this Parliament to make a statement about heart transplant services in south Manchester? The matter has been outstanding for some time, and people are worried because a well-respected unit in south Manchester could be closed. The delay is wrong. An election is upon us and the people of south Manchester ought to know the Government's intentions. Have you had such a request, sir?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no such request.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Foot and mouth has not gone away. This is the first week since the crisis began when the Minister of Agriculture has not come to the Chamber. There are strong reports that cases are being underestimated. We all have difficult constituency problems with licensing and movement of stock. First, have you received any notice that there has been a change of mind and that the Minister intends to make a statement to the House? Secondly, a lobby yesterday reported that the tourism industry had lost £12 billion so far. Is there any sign that the Minister for the Environment has changed his mind and proposes to make a statement about the taskforce? We have had numerous announcements, but constituents are writing and asking for detail. Finally, has the Prime Minister notified you that as the catastrophe has cost the British nation £20 billion, he intends to come to the House to announce the establishment of a full, independent inquiry under the impartial chairmanship of a judge?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no communication from Ministers.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your helpful replies to earlier points of order. Further to the point of order from my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), should I take it that you think that the Minister should reply if my hon. Friend accepts your very good advice? Pensioners need to know whether VAT is to be levied on their warden services, and it would be good to clear that up soon.

Mr. Speaker: That matter is up to the Minister.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not really think that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) has a point of order.

Mr. Bercow: Oh, I have.

Mr. Speaker: In that case, I shall call the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) first.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am still encountering serious problems in relation to foot and mouth, which are brought to my attention by constituents almost daily. Will you confirm, Mr. Speaker, that MAFF and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will maintain all lines of communication with election candidates, so that they may put to the Ministry any serious problems that they find and be assured that prompt action will be taken? For example, will the hotline be maintained for candidates' use?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the matter, but it is up to the Minister to decide whether he contacts candidates. We must be careful about that. I understand his difficulty and the very serious problems in rural areas, and I am sure that the Minister will take note of them.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest concerns is that many cattle will be turned out to pasture during the next couple of weeks. There is grave anxiety in my constituency, which is very rural and situated in the dairy farming area of this country, that the foot and mouth epidemic from which we have so grievously suffered might be caused to upsurge by the turning out of cattle. If that happens, candidates of all parties will need the answers that they seek from MAFF and must be able to give authoritative, reliable and, above all, responsible information to all those who have a deep anxiety about the matter and who need answers. Can you do anything to assist?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the Minister will take note of the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I must take a point of order from the other side of the House.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The shadow Chancellor was specifically asked during Treasury questions about the £6 billion hole in his pension package. He showed a great discourtesy to the House by leaving the Chamber halfway through questions, presumably to talk to the financiers about how to overcome the problem. Do you have power to call him back to the House to apologise for his discourtesy and to allow us to get answers from him on that very important point before the general election?

Mr. Speaker: That question should not have been put to the Chancellor, as he has no responsibilities on matters that concern the Opposition Front Bench in relation to the Exchequer or finance.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: The best has been saved until last.

Mr. Bercow: I never doubted that, Mr. Speaker, as your impartiality is, of course, absolutely legendary. I could not understand why my intentions could conceivably be in doubt. May I ask you, on what I think is a genuine point of order, to confirm that it is incumbent

[Mr. Bercow]

upon all hon. Members, including Ministers, to address the House? In that context, is not it somewhat disturbing that the Chancellor, while not answering questions, yet again did not address the House, but kept looking at the Labour Benches? May I put it to you that his failure to look us in the eye runs the very worrying risk of ensuring that he will be regarded as in some way shifty, disingenuous or even untrustworthy?

Mr. Speaker: I saw nothing out of order, but I must, of course, concentrate on the hon. Gentleman all the time, because he keeps talking. That sometimes distracts me, but when I was looking at the Chancellor and other Ministers, I saw nothing out of order.

Health and Social Care (Programme)(No. 3)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Health and Social Care Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 10th January and 14th February:

Lords Amendments

1. (1) Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Bill shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

(2) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order—

Nos. 6 to 17, 60 to 66, 1 to 5, 18 to 59 and 67 to 87.

Subsequent stages

2. (1) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—[*Mr. Allen.*]

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Orders of the Day

Health and Social Care Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Before Clause 12

Lords amendment: No. 6

Insert the following new Clause—

"Reform of Community Health Councils

(1) The Secretary of State shall by regulations provide for the reform of Community Health Councils established for districts in England under section 20 of the 1977 Act.

(2) The regulations shall provide for—

- (a) renaming Community Health Councils as Patients' Councils (referred to in this section as "Councils");
- (b) the information which local National Health Service bodies must provide to Councils;
- (c) the funding of Councils and the provision of premises and other facilities by the Secretary of State;
- (d) the membership of Councils.

(3) The functions of a Council are—

- (a) to establish sub-committees for each National Health Service trust and Primary Care Trust in the district of the Council, to be known as Patients' Forums (referred to in this section as "Forums");
- (b) to facilitate the co-ordination by Forums of their activities;
- (c) to make reports and submit recommendations to Health Authorities, local authorities and their committees, National Health Service trusts, Primary Care Trusts, the national patients' body for England and to the Secretary of State in accordance with the regulations;
- (d) to carry out such arrangements as may be made with the Council under section 19A of the 1977 Act (independent advocacy services);
- (e) to appoint, for each Forum within its district, one member as a non-executive director to the board of the trust to which the Forum relates;
- (f) to appoint a representative, having such functions as may be prescribed, to attend meetings of each relevant Health Authority;
- (g) to arrange for functions of Forums to be performed under joint arrangements between Councils, where such arrangements are appropriate to meet the needs of their communities;
- (h) to receive and respond to disclosures under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (c. 23) where such disclosures reveal matters of concern for patients in the health service or for the wider community;
- (i) to refer issues of concern to patients to Health Authorities, local authorities and such national quality assurance bodies as the regulations may prescribe and to the Secretary of State;
- (j) such other functions as the regulations may prescribe.

(4) The functions of a Forum are to—

- (a) monitor and review the operation of services provided by, or under arrangements made by, the trust to which it relates;
- (b) obtain the views of patients, carers and the wider community about those services and report on those views to the Council and to the trust;
- (c) having regard to the views obtained in accordance with paragraph (b), provide advice and make reports and recommendations about matters relating to those services to the Council, the relevant Health Authority, and the trust;
- (d) make available to patients and their carers advice and information about those services;
- (e) carry out such functions in relation to primary care services as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State;
- (f) in prescribed circumstances, to perform any prescribed function of the trust with respect to the provision of a service affording assistance to patients and their families and carers;
- (g) carry out such other functions as may be prescribed.

(5) Regulations shall provide for the membership of a Forum, which shall comprise—

- (a) as to at least a quarter of its membership, members or representatives of voluntary organisations whose members or client groups have an interest in the health service;
- (b) as to at least a quarter of its membership, patients;
- (c) as to at least a quarter of its membership, carers;
- (d) such other persons as may be prescribed.

(6) References in subsection (4) to "services" are references to—

- (a) services provided as part of the health service (within the meaning of the 1977 Act) in England,
- (b) services provided in England in pursuance of section 31 arrangements in relation to the exercise of health-related functions of a local authority, and
- (c) services provided elsewhere (and not part of the health service in England) in pursuance of section 31 arrangements with a local authority in England.

(7) In this section—

- (a) "relevant Health Authority" in subsection (4)(c) in relation to a Forum for a Primary Care Trust, means the Health Authority whose area is, or includes, the area for which the trust is established;
- (b) "prescribed" means prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State;
- (c) "section 31 arrangements" means arrangements under regulations under section 31 of the Health Act 1999 (c. 8) (arrangements between NHS bodies and local authorities);
- (d) "carer", in relation to a patient, means a person who provides care for the patient, but who is not employed to do so by any body in the exercise of its functions under any enactment;
- (e) "the health service" has the same meaning as in the 1977 Act;
- (f) "patient" includes (as well as a patient within the meaning of that Act) a person who receives services provided in pursuance of section 31 arrangements in relation to the exercise of health-related functions of a local authority."

12.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move, That the House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following: Lords amendments Nos. 7 and 8 and consequential amendments Nos. 1 to 7 thereto; Lords amendments Nos. 9 to 15 and Government motions to disagree thereto; Lords amendments Nos. 16, 17 and 68; Lords amendments Nos. 82 and 83 and Government motions to disagree thereto.

Mr. Denham: In setting the scene for the amendments, it is important to stress that this is a major Bill. It puts in place many of the measures and powers that are needed to modernise the NHS and to implement the NHS plan, which was launched last July with widespread support from the NHS, its staff, professional organisations and patients groups. The plan underpins the unprecedented investment in the NHS that this Government are making, but which the Conservative party would put under threat.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to speak. I gather that the Bill is the flagship Bill of the Government in their dying

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

days. Is there any particular reason why the Secretary of State is not here to present the Bill and speak to the amendments?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Lady knows that I have handled the great bulk of the stages of the Bill, and I am doing so today. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is taking part in a visit which in principle has been planned for many months.

For the first time in the history of the NHS, nursing care for the elderly will become free in nursing homes from October this year. Just in the past few days, the Conservative party has again made clear its preference for private insurance as the answer to long-term care. The Bill will protect patients and be fairer to GPs by improving the regulation of GPs and other primary care professionals. It will extend prescribing rights. It will strengthen joint working between the NHS and social services by allowing care trusts to be established. It will protect the essential work of cancer registries and other vital parts of the NHS by protecting the information flows that it needs. *[Interruption.]* As we approach the closing stages of the Bill none of those must be put in jeopardy. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister knows that we are talking not about the general terms of the Bill, but about Lords amendments to it. He should speak to them.

Mr. Denham: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. I was about to point out that because the Bill is so important we must not put its provisions in jeopardy at this stage in its progress through Parliament. The Lords amendments deal with two substantive issues: the reform of patient representation and patient information. This group of amendments deals with patient representation.

In all the challenges we face in modernising the NHS, the need to make the NHS patient-centred is one of the most fundamental. In the past 25 years too little progress has been made in that area. No matter how good each individual episode of clinical care is, too often patients feel that they have to make their way round the system instead of the system being built around their needs. They have to wait for an appointment that is inconvenient instead of being able to book one. They return time and again for different tests instead of having all the tests done on one day. Their passage from one part of the system to another, perhaps from the health service to social care, is not smooth and seamless as it should be. Too often simple problems, complaints and misunderstandings are not dealt with quickly, some then becoming major problems.

We are already taking action to tackle those issues, but we know and patients know that change will be faster, more effective and more lasting if patients and carers have a voice at the heart of every part of the NHS.

In the NHS plan we set out proposals for a radical change to the system of patient representation. In each trust and primary care trust a patient advocacy and liaison service will be able to tackle emerging problems there and then. A practical answer—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it be in order for the Minister to tell us whether he is agreeing or disagreeing with the Lords amendment and, indeed, what he is talking about? We have one hour only.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister is in order at the moment.

Mr. McLoughlin: Only just.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister is drawing a fine line.

Mr. Denham: I have sought to set the context. The Lords amendments set out proposals and amended proposals for a system of patient representation and empowerment. I hope that it will be possible to set out the Government's intentions in this Bill in trying to reform the system of patient representation, how the Lords amendments would affect that and the reason for the position that we take on the Lords amendments. I am very much in your hands, Mr. Speaker, but I hope that that approach will be acceptable.

Mr. Speaker: In my experience amendments tend to be narrow and it is best to keep to the amendment before the House.

Mr. Denham: We set out radical reforms to the system of patient representation in the NHS plan. As the Bill progressed, the system was incorporated in many amendments. The Bill provided for patients forums, and we said that we wished to co-ordinate their work locally. We established a group to consider the representation of patients through a national patients body. It recommended that the body should be statutory, and such a provision was included in the Bill in the House of Lords. Government amendments and those tabled by others, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), led to a radical and powerful Bill for patient representation. However, the amendments that were made in another place wreck the Government's approach, to which the House of Commons had made amendments.

The key amendment is technically and legally unworkable, and it would not provide the structural change based on independent patients forums or the important shift towards the direct representation of patients and carers that lie at the heart of the Government's proposals. The part of the Bill that we are considering is controversial, and I believe that, before the Lords amendments, the measure was a significant improvement on the original. It reflected much of the discussion that took place inside and outside Parliament. Many people, including many in community health councils, will be disappointed that the provisions will be withdrawn.

At this stage of a Parliament, progress on Bills depends on the rapid agreement of both Houses. Several Bills have already fallen because such agreement was unattainable. The most disgraceful example is the Tobacco Advertising Bill, which has fallen because of Conservative party—

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it pertinent for the Minister to mention a different Bill when we have only one hour to debate the measure?

Mr. Speaker: Regardless of the time available, all hon. Members, including Ministers, must keep to the amendment that we are considering. It is a narrow amendment.

Mr. Denham: I hoped to draw attention to the fact that other Bills had suffered the same fate as the part of the measure that we are considering. We made significant efforts to find an agreed way forward in the light of the Lords amendments. However, given the time constraints imposed by an impending general election, it is clear that the Bill would be jeopardised unless we removed the clauses that related to patient representation.

We are determined to empower patients more. However, we are also determined to lift the burden of nursing costs from elderly people and their families as soon as possible; indeed, from October. We shall give up the clauses because we are not prepared to put at risk free nursing care for the elderly. We are determined to fulfil our commitment to pensioners.

The amendments that we have tabled, alongside the Lords amendments, will remove the necessary clauses from the Bill. We agree with Lords amendments Nos. 7 and 8, which remove the clauses on patients forums and patients councils. We disagree with Lords amendments Nos. 14 and 4 to remove any link between independent advocacy and patients councils. Lords amendments Nos. 16 and 17, with which we agree, ensure that CHCs will continue. We must therefore disagree with Lords amendment No. 15, and thus remove the national patients body. We regret its loss and believe that the proposed wider role and membership, and the opportunity to include voluntary organisations that represent patients, would be a considerable step forward. However, we cannot have two national statutory bodies that both seek to represent patients and the public. We must therefore withdraw the proposals for the new body.

We must reconsider how to pick up the proposals from the feasibility study, that we established on national patient representation. It was carried out for the Department by a consortium of leading patients' organisations. We do not wish to lose sight of the vision that it set out in its report.

We oppose Lords amendment No. 6, which seeks to transform CHCs into patients councils and reduce patients forums to mere sub-committees of CHCs. As I said earlier, that does not offer the basis of a realistic or workable way forward. The clause is technically deficient. If it were left on the statute book, it would lead to future arrangements for patient representation being decided in the courts rather than in the House. Consequential to that position and the removal of patients forums and councils are our amendments Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 82 and 83, which remove clauses 14, 15 and 16, and further technical changes. The Government also disagree with Lords amendments Nos. 10, 11, 12 and 13, which would have amended the clauses relating to patients councils and forums.

It might be helpful if I summarise the effect of the Government's proposals on the relevant legislation and policy. Although the effect of the amendments would be to leave the legislation governing community health councils as it stands, the Bill will still introduce significant changes. Overview and scrutiny committees of democratically elected councils will scrutinise the NHS, a change that has been supported in both Houses and was unaffected and unchallenged by the Lords amendments. The change has broad support and we will want to ensure that it is implemented. Among other things, overview and scrutiny committees will be given the role of referring local service change proposals to the Secretary of State and the independent reconfiguration committee when the committee does not think the proposals are in the interests of the local population.

The Secretary of State will still have the responsibility introduced in this place to ensure the provision of an independent patient advocacy service, which also will be widely welcomed. The first patient advocacy and liaison services are now being established in trusts across the country, often involving former CHC staff.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently set out our plans to have far fewer, but more strategic, health authorities. The move to 30 strategic health authorities has been widely welcomed.

Mr. Hammond: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister be asked to clarify to which Lords amendments those specific points relate?

Mr. Speaker: We must allow the Minister to express himself as he wishes to express himself.

Mr. Denham: It might be useful to the House and for the benefit of Conservative Members—I have no intention of talking out this debate—if I set out as clearly as possible the legal and policy position that would pertain if the House were to follow the advice that I am giving on the Lords amendments that we wish to accept, the Lords amendments with which we disagree, and the Government's own amendments. I am briefly setting out that scenario.

I have made it clear—perhaps I need to repeat the points—that, although the legal position governing CHCs would remain as it is, there would be consequential changes to the Bill. Overview and scrutiny committees would take on the role that we have set out for them, and the Secretary of State will have a responsibility to provide independent patient advocacy services.

The move to 30 strategic health authorities is one of the matters that will govern change in the future. The change has been widely welcomed as part of our commitment to devolving power and resources to the front line. It would be ludicrous to assume that patient representation can be championed effectively by ever-more remote committees. What is needed is patient representation within every NHS organisation. We shall still seek to establish patients forums, which are an essential tool if patients are to challenge and change each part of the NHS. Although we would need further legislation to give them the statutory independence that we would like them to have, non-statutory forums can be established in the interim.

Change is therefore inevitable. We will have to return to those matters after the election and further legislation may be necessary. However, as we have said from the beginning, any change must be as seamless as is practical and make the best and most appropriate use of the skills and expertise that are already within the system.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the next hon. Member, I must draw the House's attention to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendments Nos. 15 and 66. If the House agrees to either of those amendments, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I shall be relatively brief.

[Dr. Liam Fox]

None of us expected quite such a rapid victory for common sense as we have been seeing in the Chamber today. I share my hon. Friends' disappointment that the Secretary of State could not attend this debate and eat humble pie himself. It seems that he finds that diet unpalatable, and that the Prime Minister's three-week humility does not apply to all his Cabinet Ministers.

The Minister was scrambling round for a description of the Government's position as a consequence of their position on the Lords amendments, but I shall try to help him. Climbdown, U-turn and humiliation are all reasonable descriptions of his position today.

1 pm

As for the Minister's unmitigated drivel about the need to protect free nursing care, which is Conservative party policy, it really was a very poor excuse indeed. However, I am sure that he will have the gratitude of at least some of his Back Benchers for abandoning one of the most ridiculous and disastrous policies to emerge from the Department of Health in the past four years. We shall not divide the House, as we agree with the position that the Minister has taken on the Lords amendments. The effect of what the Government are saying today will be simply to return us to the status quo, which is where we wanted to be all along.

There would have been no need to have ridiculous and lengthy debates on the subject only to arrive back where we started, if only Ministers had been willing to listen to representations that were made the length and breadth of the country, by those of all party political persuasions and none, to the effect that this was a poor decision that was not in the interest of patients and only in the interests of those who wanted a lapdog rather than a watchdog for patients.

The Lords amendments will return us to the position that community health councils are currently in, acting as a one-stop shop for patients. The community health councils that were created by a Conservative Government in 1973 offer free labour to the NHS worth £8 million a year. Each year, community health councils assist about 30,000 people, yet they were kept in the dark about the Government's plans.

When Ministers were asked about consultation they did not accept that ACHCEW—the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales—or the CHCs themselves had any legitimate expectation of consultation on the proposal that CHCs should be abolished through primary legislation to be introduced in Parliament in due course. That arrogance was one of the main reasons why their Lordships were unwilling to accept the Government's plans. In addition, apparently the Government had no idea of what would happen to CHC staff or the records that were kept by CHC. All that made a poor situation overwhelmingly unsatisfactory. The overwhelming view on both sides of the House, which is held by everyone except those on the Government Front Bench, is that there should now be a reform rather than abolition.

Government Back Benchers who might have taken some short-term comfort from the Minister's words may not be so happy when they read the Department of Health press release that says that, should the Government be re-elected, they propose to continue with the abolition of community health councils. It will therefore be increasingly clear up and down the country that those who have been helped by community health councils, those who assist community health councils and those who work for community health councils will know that a vote for the Conservatives will keep the community health councils and a vote for Labour will abolish them.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I very much welcome the fact that the Government are going back to the drawing board on this issue. That will come as no surprise to anyone who has heard my previous comments on the Bill. On Second Reading, I said that the Bill

> "contains many positive measures, but also some that need to be given further thought . . . Of particular concern are the proposals in clauses 7 to 14, regarding scrutiny and complaints . . . I feel that there has not been adequate public consultation and discussion . . . I get the distinct impression that the proposals regarding CHCs and scrutiny were something of an afterthought."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2001; Vol. 360, c. 1104-105.]

As the Minister is well aware, my main concerns related to the fragmentation of the system that was being proposed to replace CHCs—the lack of independence and the lack of clear proposals for independent patient advocacy. I welcome the fact that the amendments on advocacy reflecting the concerns of the Select Committee on Health have been retained. We all accept that that is a major step forward.

On Report, I moved the new clauses in respect of patients councils in order to create an umbrella body that would draw together the various forums, reflecting the role that CHCs have undertaken over many years and the advocacy service to which the Government have agreed. I said:

> "I make no bones about the fact that I am proposing a framework that needs to be examined in more detail."

I recognised that a lot more work needed to be done and said:

> "We must consider continuity between any change and the new system. I genuinely hope that some of those who have served so well on CHCs will make a major contribution within the new system."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 395-96.]

That was what I felt needed to be done in the House of Lords. I am conscious that the deliberations in the other place were constructive, because the official Opposition changed their position between the Commons and the Lords. The Conservatives in the Lords actually backed the idea of patient councils as a reform that could improve the position of patients. I recognise that there were differences over the detail, including the issue of the relationship between patients councils and forums.

The Lords amendment does not reflect the importance of the patients forums, which will be front-line bodies that will play an important role. I understand the reservations of my right hon. Friend the Minister on that point and I also understand the difficulties involved in the continuity question. I welcome the Government's willingness to make further proposals in that area.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said that we were back to the status quo, but he is wrong. He nodded a moment ago when I mentioned independent advocacy, which is a major step forward, and I am sure that he—and the Liberal Democrats, given their previous position—will support that reform.

Dr. Fox: If I may clarify the position, I meant that we are back to the status quo for the CHCs, and we welcome the additional proposals. Will the hon. Gentleman return the favour by telling us whether he will campaign in the general election on his party's ticket to abolish CHCs?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I made my position clear on Second Reading, when I said that the CHCs' functions need to be radically reformed, and the hon. Gentleman is well aware of that. I was a member of my local CHC for many years, and its members know that I believe that we need to modernise that scrutiny function and reflect the marked change in the whole direction of the NHS that has taken place, rightly, under this Government.

I would welcome the assurance of my right hon. Friend the Minister on whether the advocacy arrangements proposed in the Bill will ensure, as the Health Committee suggested, that the advocacy function can be placed temporarily with CHCs, so that patients have a clear, independent voice. I would also welcome his comments on where the advocacy function will be placed, as the Bill stands, and on the current position of CHC members, who are hard-working volunteers and need some assurances about their future role.

I am also concerned about the position of the staff of CHCs and of the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales. Serious questions have been raised about their their job security and future role. Those people have done a good job in many respects and I would be grateful for my right hon. Friend's comments. I also wish to praise the work of Donna Covey at ACHCEW; she has attempted to work closely with the Government and other parties, in difficult circumstances, to reach some solution that will reflect the concerns of those who want a modernised system.

Patients also need some assurances about the interim period. Will they still have access to CHCs carrying out the functions that they now perform? Can my right hon. Friend confirm my hope that the advocacy function will be available, once the Bill takes effect, within CHCs to assist patients in a way that many of them are not now assisted?

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): The Government's proposals started out as a curate's egg and ended up as a dog's breakfast. We have taken the view from the beginning that what the Government proposed had three essential flaws. The first was a lack of independence in the arrangements. The second was a lack of cohesion—we were concerned that the system would be so fragmented—and the third was that no national body was proposed that would provide a voice for patients at national level.

During the progress of the Bill, some of those issues have been addressed in part. For example, the patients forums were taken away from the trusts, which originally were to fund and establish them. The provisions for independent advocacy also increased the independence of the new arrangements. The Government conceded in the other place that there should be a national body to represent patients at national level.

Just as the Bill was leaving this House, an amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) proposed the creation of patients councils. That would have gone some way towards addressing the point about cohesion. We believe that patients councils could have become very worthwhile bodies, especially given the bigger health authority footprint that is now being talked about, and that they should have been responsible for the independent advocacy service.

The House of Lords, when it considered the amendment, wanted to put patients councils on a firmer footing. Their Lordships wanted the councils to be clearly marked out as successor bodies to the community health councils. It is regrettable that the Government did not feel able to accept that, but they seem to have concluded that it would be better to go back to a blank sheet; and we do not intend to obstruct them in that.

We will have to return to this matter, both during the election campaign and after it. If we are going to start from a blank sheet of paper, I hope very much that any decision made by the House about future arrangements for patient representation will provide for a set-up that is strong, independent, coherent, properly funded and represented by a national body.

The Government will feel some embarrassment that they have had to withdraw their proposal at this stage of the Bill's progress. The proposal was always flawed, but I have every hope that, after the election, we will arrive at an arrangement that is in the best interests of patients.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): There are times when one's faith in the democratic process is confirmed, even in this Parliament under this Government. I raised the matter of the widespread opposition in the country to the Government's peremptory proposal to abolish CHCs at one Prime Minister's Question Time last year. I received a dusty answer and was told that consultation was being held and that a report on that consultation would be made to the House. Only three days later, the Prime Minister sent me a grovelling letter signed, as seems to be his habit, "Yours ever, Tony". In it, he admitted that a decision had been made and that the Government were not going to consult on the abolition of CHCs after all.

The abolition proposal was set out in the small print of the middle chapters of last summer's NHS plan. I am delighted that the Government's craven climbdown at this late hour means that the excellent Chester and Ellesmere Port and Cheshire Central CHCs will be able to continue their good work, under their respective chief officers Mr. Geoff Ryall-Harvey and Mrs. Jean French.

Those chief officers have not been assisted by the Government's brutal and mindless approach to the welfare of CHC staff and volunteers. I talked to Mr. Ryall-Harvey this morning. I thought that today's debate might turn out as it has, but of course was not able to say as much. The irony is that Mr. Ryall-Harvey told me that he had just returned from an out-placement session that was held because it was believed that the Government were confident that they would succeed in getting the abolition proposal through the House.

I am glad to say that the Government have failed, and that opposition to the proposal has emerged among hon. Members of all parties, including Labour Back-Bench Members, and in the other place. We have been deeply upset on behalf of patients, staff and NHS users at what amounted to an appalling attack on the independence of patients and on their confidence that they can discuss the difficult issues that arise when things go wrong. That is when people with grievous and worrying problems are at

[Mr. Stephen O'Brien]

their most vulnerable and need people of independence and authority who can inspire confidence that solutions can be found.

These issues were highlighted during an excellent debate in Westminster Hall. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), the shadow Secretary of State for Health, and his team for having championed the retention of CHCs so successfully. It is common ground across the House and among CHCs that they need updating and reform. However, all the good work that they have done does not need to be undermined by the Government's wish to abolish them, which has done untold damage. The wind-down, in anticipation of abolition, has caused grievous morale problems.

1.15 pm

It must be made clear that, despite this shoddy process, the Government's shabby conduct and a shameful policy, this is only a temporary reprieve. If a Labour Government are returned, they will again campaign for the abolition of CHCs, and it will cause their Back Benchers no end of difficulty. We, however, will be saying, in any campaign and challenge that is put to Conservative party candidates in the forthcoming election, that we will retain CHCs, reform them and commit ourselves to their independence.

I am proud to have played a small part in the campaign to retain CHCs, and I am glad that the Government have given way at last on this terrible policy.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): The House is grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) for getting the Prime Minister, in effect, to mis-speak. In the follow-up letter, it was made clear that there had been no consultation before the Government's decision to abolish community health councils as legal entities.

I think that the reaction of the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, which joined in the campaign strongly after a slow start, was based on what my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury did and also on the actions of the Worthing district community health council. It wrote to the association asking what action it would take. Then we discovered that what the Government assumed to be a done deal across the country was not one, and that community health councils had been objecting strongly. *[Interruption.]* Some Government Back Benchers must have pager messages saying "smile" at this point, but it is no laughing matter. It matters a great deal to people with hospital appointment problems, those who have concerns or who want to draw Ministers into the reconfiguration of hospital services. If the Government said that they had a fragmented responsibility to the CHCs to bring general practitioner services into their field, that would make sense.

I have in my hand a letter from one of my constituents, who is 71. His family doctor referred him to a specialist clinic. The letter he got back said:

> "You have been referred to . . . the Pain Management Unit at St. Thomas's Hospital. We are writing to confirm that you are now on our waiting list, and we hope to be able to offer you an appointment in 15 months' time."

[Interruption.] The Government Whip may ask what this has to do with community health councils. CHCs would, rightly, ask how on earth that person was supposed to bear his pain for 15 months while the hospital decides whether it can offer him an appointment. That does not necessarily mean treatment. The Minister looks upset about this. He jolly well should be; so is my constituent.

People are doing more and more at Worthing hospital, but it should be plain, even to a Health Minister, that more is being left undone than was the case four years ago. The right hon. Gentleman may say that that is not so, in which case I refer him to his own answers, which show the proportion of people waiting for in-patient treatment for more than a year, how that figure compares with four years ago, and how it compares with the figure for the health authority covering the Prime Minister's constituency.

It would be proper for the Worthing district community health council to take up the question of a 47-week delay in seeing a consultant in Worthing hospital. If the Government want to extend CHCs' powers to include the family practitioner service, the overload there is probably just as great. Regrettably, family doctors in Worthing, south of the railway line—which has probably the greatest concentration of those over 85 in the country—have closed their lists to new patients and will now take only those referred through the health authority. For that to happen, after four years of the Government's stewardship, is something that CHCs should take up.

Ministers know that holding the election 12 months early has helped to save community health councils. They should drop the Labour party desire to abolish community health councils and seek all-party agreement to extend the CHC role to cover family doctor services. CHCs can thus help health workers—doctors, nurses and others; they are willing to take up complaints and, most of all, they ensure that there is a public, independent, knowledgeable and continuous voice to make plain that what is happening at present is unacceptable.

Ministers seem to fear people saying that what is happening is unacceptable, but waiting 15 months or 47 weeks to see a consultant and the closing of GP lists are certainly not acceptable to me. I doubt that they are acceptable to Labour Members either. CHCs have a proper role to play in ensuring that the situation changes and changes fast. Do not abolish CHCs.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): I add my voice to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). When we considered this matter in the Health Committee, we were convinced of the need for a less haphazard advocacy system that was genuinely independent. Advocates must be independent of the hospital trusts that employ them and which they investigate. We certainly need the advocacy system to be more widespread. The system must be strengthened by making it coherent and common to all trusts. It must be genuinely independent. I am glad that the Government have listened and that more acceptable proposals have been made.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reinforcing the points that I made in my speech. As this may be my hon. Friend's last contribution in the House, I feel it appropriate to pay tribute to him for his work on the Health Committee, and in representing his constituents in Morley and Rothwell and in local government over many years. He is still widely respected for his work as a member of West Yorkshire county council. I am sure that we all wish him well in his retirement.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): I join in the tribute to the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Gunnell) for his work on the Health Committee. As he will remember, he and I have jousted in Committees on several occasions. I, too, wish him well in his retirement.

I am extremely pleased that there has been a reprieve for the East Herts and North Herts community health councils, both of which have a valuable function in my constituency. They check on cleanliness in hospitals, investigate food quality and, at their statutory meetings with the health authority, have been instrumental in teasing out some of our financial problems.

My concerns about the proposals related to independence and continuity. The CHC representatives who carried out inspections of Queen Elizabeth II hospital in Welwyn Garden City and highlighted problems with cleaning contracts have a continuity of experience with that hospital. The representatives of the North Herts CHC who inspected Lister hospital, looking into diet and the quality of food preparation, also have that continuity of experience. They are independent; they say what they see.

It may not be convenient for Governments to have such independent people telling them what is right or wrong with local health services. However, as a Member of Parliament, it is helpful to me to know that there is a truly independent sounding board, which has continuity. The statutory meeting of the East Herts CHC certainly brought out—through questioning and contributions from the health authority—some of the financial difficulties that had occurred during the past few months in East and North Hertfordshire. That process was extremely helpful.

Mr. Denham: Can the hon. Gentleman identify a single way in which the patients forums or the patients councils, as we proposed them, would be less statutorily independent than CHCs?

Mr. Heald: One of the greatest achievements of the community health councils has been casualty watch. It is to have a national body—

Mr. Denham *rose—*

Mr. Heald: Let me finish the point. It is to have a national body, which will be able to co-ordinate these matters, and which will be independent and able to communicate fearlessly the picture for the country as a whole. Governments do not like that, but the public at large and Members of Parliament certainly appreciate it.

Mr. Denham: Why would the national body as set out in the Bill have been in any way less able to do casualty watch than the CHCs are at the moment? We have made it clear that it could do so equally well.

Mr. Heald: We want something that is genuinely independent, and we want it—[*Laughter.*] The Minister laughs, but independence is important. We are used to a Government who constantly spin figures and change the basis of figures—a Government who are all about spin rather than reality. If it is independent—

Mr. Hammond: Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem is that the patients councils and patients forums as proposed in the Bill would be established by secondary legislation—regulations introduced by the Secretary of State—and would not be enshrined in primary legislation, as CHCs are?

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friend is right about that. All too often, we are asked to accept assurances. We know what the community health councils and the national body do at the moment. We are expected to give the Government carte blanche because they are nice people giving us assurances, but that is unacceptable. We want it in the law.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to make this short contribution to the debate.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): I am very disappointed with the situation that we now face. People have put a great deal of work into trying to find answers to a multitude of questions, but those questions remain on the table and all the work will have to start again.

A lot of work has been put in over the past 10 months to make sense of a set of proposals that, to start with, were fragmented and posed more questions than they answered. When the Bill left the House on Third Reading, it contained a much better set of proposals. The new structure for patient representation was not nearly as fragmented as it was when it was first suggested, thanks to the Government's acceptance of the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), and thanks to a great deal of work that had been done outside this place, by civil servants and others, to which the Government paid attention. With patients councils forming the overview and the administrative cohesion that was missing from the initial set of proposals, we had a structure that would have worked and would have made sense locally.

The statutory, independent patients forums would be very important for every part of the local health service. They would not perpetuate the traditional emphasis on hospitals—the acute sector—but would give equal importance to the primary care sector, and to community health services. Patients councils would have been well able to play the important role of fitting that structure together. They would also provide a means of disseminating and receiving information, locally, regionally and nationally, and a means of informing local authority scrutiny committees.

We have not returned to where we started, but the situation is unsatisfactory and unresolved, and people will still have in mind questions that they will pose in the weeks and months ahead, to which the Government will need to return in future.

Will the Minister give one assurance? Will he acknowledge that no system that deals with patient representation and patient empowerment will work unless it has the good will of all the people who are already involved in those areas? Most of them serve on CHCs and most are volunteers, but many work for other voluntary

[Mr. Patrick Hall]

organisations, as my right hon. Friend will know. Their good will and work needs to be acknowledged. The Government could have begun the process in a better way with regard to those people. The process began 10 months ago and there has been constructive consultation since, but there will certainly have to be a great deal more of it to deal with these matters when the Government return to power.

I should like an assurance from my right hon. Friend that the views of those in the voluntary sector—voluntary members of CHCs as well as staff—will be taken on board, so that such people will be fully involved in returning to the drawing board to consider the new structure. We need the involvement of those people to make any new structure work.

1.30 pm

Mr. Hammond: We really should not be having this debate. If the Government had listened to what people had to say and genuinely consulted at the outset, as they pretended they had, they would have realised that the Bill's proposals were unacceptable. They are unacceptable to the Conservative Opposition, to all other parties in the House and, indeed, to the great majority of Labour Back Benchers. They are unacceptable to outside bodies representing patients and to most commentators on the subject. It is only the Government's arrogance that has resulted in their having to make such a humiliating climbdown at the 11th hour.

The Minister is wrong to suggest—indeed, the Labour party was wrong to suggest in last night's press release—that the climbdown is somehow in order to save the principle of free nursing care. I believe that all parties in the House have expressed their support for the introduction of free nursing care.

Clause 56 removes from local authorities the statutory duty to provide or procure free nursing care, and the power to do so. There is no reason why, if clause 56 had fallen and the Bill had not become law, the Government could not have introduced free nursing care by directing health authorities to pay for it—unless the Minister is suggesting that the country is littered with local authorities that would insist on paying for such care even when their health authorities were offering to do so and to provide it.

I do not want to take up too much of the House's time, but I should like to ask the Minister one or two specific questions; he has come to the House supported by the usual invisible army, and I know that he would be disappointed if I did not do so. How has he reconciled the retention of community health councils with the creation of overview and scrutiny committees? There will be significant overlap of their functions and a potential for conflict between them.

Will the Minister explain Government amendment No. 4, which proposes to leave out subsections (6) and (7) of proposed new section 19A, under clause 17, which deals with the introduction of independent advocacy services? Proposed new subsection (6) provides that, before making arrangements for independent advocacy services, the Secretary of State should consult the relevant patients council and any other persons "as he considers appropriate". Obviously, there will be no patients councils to consult, so it is entirely appropriate to remove that reference. However, why should the Secretary of State not consult

"such other persons as he considers appropriate"?

By removing the subsection, the Minister will be allowing the Secretary of State to introduce regulations for the provision of independent advocacy services without a requirement to consult anybody on doing so.

Government amendment No. 7 addresses schedule 5. It is not clear why the House should be minded to agree to the removal of a definition of a patient advocacy and liaison service, and to giving the Secretary of State free rein to define such a service through any regulations and in any way he chooses. I would be grateful if the Minister could elaborate on those two points, because they are not merely consequential amendments, but significant changes to the process that the Secretary of State will have to undertake.

Throughout, the Government's case for abolishing the CHCs is that they want to introduce something that is much stronger and much more effective. Their problem has been that no one believes them. It is true that CHCs are a thorn in the side of Health Ministers. The Minister knows that and my right hon. and hon. Friends have told me the same thing. The function of CHCs is to be a thorn in the side of Health Ministers.

One of the most common outputs of CHCs that Members receive is the excellent publication "Casualty Watch". Let us consider the Government's version of their motivation. The Secretary of State was sitting one morning in his office reading a copy of the *Daily Mail* with the headline, "The abandoned patients—Catalogue of shame as hospitals leave elderly waiting on trolleys". The article beneath it added:

> "A survey by Community Health Council workers across London revealed horrific examples of sick patients"

and so on. We are asked to believe that the Secretary of State said to his advisers, "I have a great idea. Why don't we strengthen these bodies? Why don't we make them more independent and more effective so that they can produce more of this type of documentation and circulate it to the press and Opposition Members of Parliament?" That is a totally implausible scenario.

Mr. Clive Efford (Eltham): Instead of waving about the publications of the CHCs, would the hon. Gentleman explain why the previous Conservative Government cut the budget of *CHC News*, which kept the members of CHCs, like myself, informed of the issues that the CHCs were taking up with the Government? That measure made CHCs less effective.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman might remember that the previous Conservative Government created CHCs precisely to undertake a scrutiny function.

The Government have got themselves into a position in which Labour candidates will go into the general election pledging to abolish CHCs. Those candidates will have to defend the indefensible position that the Government have adopted in wishing to destroy these independent watchdogs and voices for patients. As the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) said, the Government have created a dog's breakfast.

We are delighted that CHCs have been reprieved by the Government's climbdown today, but we would much prefer to hear that the Government permanently accept the advice that they have received from both sides of the House and from all sections of opinion outside that the CHCs should be retained and reformed. Instead, I hear from the Minister that this is a measure of expediency and that a Labour Government, if re-elected, would move swiftly to abolish the CHCs and remove the independent voice that they provide for patients.

Mr. Denham: When I outlined the Government's position, I was able to set out exactly what would happen as a consequence of the amendments. I shall not respond to the Conservative party's caricature of our position as I have set out the policy that we shall pursue in the weeks to come.

The debate has been revealing because not a single Conservative Members has engaged with the fundamental challenge that we set out to tackle. The fact is that, despite much hard work and good will, 25 years on, we do not have a patient-centred NHS or the structures that mean that it has been organised around the needs of patients. Nothing other than that fact motivated my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, me and other Ministers to introduce the proposals in the NHS plan. They remain our commitment.

I do not criticise hon. Members who want to praise the work of their local community health council, but the debate revealed the extent to which the Conservatives have tried to caricature what the Government proposed. It simply is not true that we wanted less independent and less powerful bodies, that were not as able to speak up for patients or to carry out activities—such as those performed by Casualty Watch—as the CHCs. We wanted to achieve a system of patients councils, patients forums and a national body that, taken together, would have been stronger, more powerful and, indeed, more independent than today's arrangements. I believe that we could have achieved that and had greater consistency across the country because everyone accepts that services are patchy and inconsistent. The hon. Members for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley), for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) and for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) clearly had not attempted to read or understand the Bill before it went to the other place or after it was initially amended there.

There is one reason—and only one—why the Government have reached this decision. Everyone knows that, at this stage of a Parliament, unless both Houses of Parliament agree on all aspects of a Bill, it will fall. In this case, the provisions for free nursing care would have fallen with it. If the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) really believes that this primary legislation is not needed, it is a little late for him to speak up now. He did not say that previously. We need primary legislation so that we have a secure statutory base for what we intend to do. We are not prepared to lose free nursing care because both Houses cannot agree on other aspects of the Bill. That is a fundamental principle and the right position to take.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister acknowledge that I raised that point in Committee?

Mr. Denham: I had not realised that the hon. Gentleman was also wrong in Committee, but if he wants me to confirm that, then fine. Doing things by direction does not provide a satisfactorily—

Mr. Hammond: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister asked why I did not raise the matter before, and I told him that I had in Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): That is not a matter for the Chair

Mr. Denham: I apologise for not realising that the hon. Gentleman was wrong twice. I thought that he was wrong only once. For the record, however, I confirm that he was wrong twice.

Let me stress that we are not prepared to lose free nursing care because the two Houses of Parliament fail to agree.

I suspect that I will not have time to cover in detail all the issues raised. On the overview and scrutiny committees, we will need to consider in depth, after the election, the way in which their new powers will fit with the legal powers of CHCs. That is important. We will have to consider the best way of delivering advocacy services, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Gunnell) referred. Given the support of the CHC staff association for the Bill a few weeks ago, I regret the fact that there might be some uncertainty about it. We will want to work with them in the weeks and months to come to ensure that their position is properly looked after.

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendment disagreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendments Nos. 9 to 15, 62, 73, 74, 82 and 83 disagreed to.

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to [one with Special Entry].

Consequential amendments Nos. 1 to 9 agreed to.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to certain of their amendments to the Bill: Mr. John Denham, Maria Eagle, Mr. Philip Hammond, Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. Peter Luff; Mr. John Denham to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee—[*Mr. Jamieson.*]

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to certain of Lord amendments reported, and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

Criminal Justice and Police Bill (Programme)(No. 2)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Criminal Justice and Police Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 29th January:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. (1) Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

2. (1) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—[*Mr. Touhig.*]

Criminal Justice and Police Bill

Lords amendments considered.

1.50 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): I must draw the attention of the House to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendment No. 25. If the House agrees to the amendment, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

Clause 1

OFFENCES LEADING TO PENALTIES ON THE SPOT

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 2, leave out lines 20 and 21.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 2.

Mr. Clarke: It may be for the convenience of the House if I indicate now that the Government do not intend to divide the House on any of the Lords amendments that we shall consider this afternoon, including Lords amendment No. 35 to clause 126, on which the Government were defeated in the other place yesterday. I shall briefly set out the reasons for that in relation to each group of amendments when we come to them.

At this stage, I should like to pay tribute to the Opposition—both Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in this House and the other place—because we have all sought to work co-operatively and constructively to achieve a situation in which the Bill can be dealt with as effectively as possible. That is reflected in the amendments before us.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The Bill has been subject to a new form of scrutiny under the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Obviously, given the time scale, there has not been time to debate the Committee's report. Given the comments of the Father of the House yesterday about Parliament needing greater powers of scrutiny, will my hon. Friend comment on the grilling that he and his officials were given by the Committee and, in particular, on whether that was a constructive approach? It would benefit the House to know that.

Mr. Clarke: I am happy to comment on that briefly. I was the first Minister to give evidence to the Joint Committee on the implications of the legislation, and that was a substantive and critical process. The Committee's report was positive and constructive and opens up ways in which we can address human rights issues more effectively. Many fears have been expressed about the implications of the Human Rights Act 1998 for many aspects of public life. So far, however, the courts' decisions on those questions, including the High Court's decisions on planning yesterday, indicate that the Act can improve and enhance the way in which we work without jeopardising the traditional way in which we have done things in this country. The work of the Joint Committee, to which my hon. Friend referred, is important in that regard, and I pay tribute to its report.

The amendments will remove two offences from the list under clause 1 to which fixed penalty notices apply. That will mean that penalty notices cannot be issued for offences of criminal damage or offences under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986. Amendments were tabled in Committee by Lord Cope, Viscount Bridgeman and Baroness Buscombe. As a result of an extremely constructive debate in the other place and after careful consideration, we are content to omit both offences from the list of those for which penalty notices can be issued. That will allow time for further consideration of the practicalities of how the penalty notice scheme will operate in relation to such offences. The affirmative order procedure can then be used to put back in whatever is agreed.

I acknowledge that, in Committee, the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) raised many concerns about high level criminal damage and that well-motivated amendments were tabled by his colleagues in the other place; they were trying to improve the law, not adopting a pettifogging or nitpicking approach.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): What is it about those two offences that distinguishes them from the others? Why has the Minister agreed to the removal of just those two from the list?

Mr. Clarke: There was a different reason for removing each offence. In Committee, the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire made a series of arguments about criminal damage. He said that, with the higher level of criminal damage, there was a danger of the fixed penalty notice procedure being used to evade the full possibility of higher level criminal sanctions. I think that he would acknowledge that I made it clear that that was not our intention and that we were dealing only with offences that caused a lower level of criminal damage. However, there was the ambiguity to which he drew attention in Committee, as did his noble Friends in the other place. We therefore decided to remove the offence from the list.

On the public order offence, it was argued in the other place and by the hon. Gentleman in Committee—he can speak for himself in this debate—that it was important to have a clear record of individuals who had been involved in such offences. Concern was expressed that without such a record, the fixed penalty notice procedure could undermine what the police sought to achieve more generally.

We did not entirely accept that argument. We did not think that it had as much force as the criminal damage point that the hon. Gentleman raised earlier, but we thought that it was not an insubstantial point. Because secondary legislation will allow us to revisit the matter, we were prepared to accept the amendments tabled in the other place. That was our reason for picking those two offences out of the list of eight—I think that that was the original number—offences under the fixed penalty notice procedure. I hope that the House will agree to the amendment tabled by the Lords.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): May I say how pleased I am that the other place has agreed the two amendments? As the Minister said, the matters were discussed in Committee. The argument for omitting the two offences from the fixed penalty notice regime was based partly on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) on Second Reading, and partly on our analysis of fixed penalty notices.

Fixed penalty notices should deal with the most minor offences of their type. They are not for more serious matters. As my hon. Friend pointed out on Second Reading, if a more serious offence of criminal damage was dealt with under this procedure, first, there would be a problem with compensation, which is payable only on conviction, and secondly, the procedure would not mark the event adequately. Serious offences of criminal damage are serious matters.

We took the view that public order offences are serious and that the fixed penalty notice regime was not entirely suitable. As the Minister observed, and as I pointed out previously, it is important that we know who is committing public order offences and that we have a record so that if, for example, we want to identify those who are guilty of football hooliganism in order to implement the appropriate provisions, or if we want to deal with those who are conspicuous in their activities on May day, we know how many times those people have committed public order offences and broadly what they have done. That was the thinking behind the amendments. I am pleased that the Minister agrees that the Lords amendments should stand.

There has not been an opportunity for members of the Committee to thank the staff, the police and the Chairman of the Committee. I shall say nothing further about the Committee stage. There is still a motion on the Order Paper, which I am glad will not be debated. However, it is right to put on record our thanks to the staff and all those who helped us in Committee, as we would have done if the Committee had ended in the normal way.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): We support the amendments. The Government and colleagues will remember that our view was that the list of fixed penalty offences was far too long. To correct the Minister's recollection, there were 12 offences in the list that the Government wanted added. We thought that some of them were too serious to be the subject of fixed penalty notices, and some were not serious enough. We took the view that if the Government had been doing their work properly, they would have provided for other offences to be added, but allowed for separate consideration of those offences in due course, without pressure, rather than picking out of the consultation process such a motley group of offences.

The amendments whittle down the group of offences from 12 to 10. To that extent, the Bill has been improved and brought nearer to what we sought to achieve. However, it is still not ideal and contains offences that are inappropriate for the application of fixed penalty notices. It is sad that we must now proceed by amending legislation in future to get the matter right, rather than by deciding it through the secondary statutory instrument procedure that is otherwise available to us.

2 pm

Neither the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) nor I engaged in the debate that we could have had a moment ago, as such discussion would have eaten into the time that is allowed us. However, I want to place on record one of the frustrations of the way in which the Bill has been considered—a frustration that does not apply only to amendments such as those before us. The process has ensured that the flagship Bill of this Session has been rushed through this House, pushed under pressure in the other place and then guillotined in its final stage. We all understand that matters are curtailed when the Dissolution of Parliament is announced and we make no complaint about that. However, it is entirely unsatisfactory to allow flagship legislation to be chopped for debate in the House of Commons, pressurised into less debate in the Lords and then chopped and curtailed again in this House. I regret that that process ensures that, although there are matters proper for debate, we will have the minimum time available—one hour—to debate them. The amendments improve the Bill, but in our view, they do not improve it enough. Of course, I expect that we will speak about some of its remaining defects later.

Mr. Malins: As always, I declare an interest as a recorder of the Crown court and a deputy district judge.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), I have been made a little happier, as the amendments remove two of the potentially more serious offences from the clause, so that we can see how it works. The problem with an offence under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 is that the top end of the scale is quite nasty and can be very serious.

If a youngster tells a policemen to "something off"—the House will know what I could have said—his action can be used by the police as a section 5 offence. That happens a lot in London. I would be a little unhappy if such an offence were to get a ticket. There is sometimes a risk of moving into the criminal sphere matters that it does not encompass, and the large scale of section 5 means that it is right for the specified offence to be removed from the clause. Likewise, for the reasons so eloquently explained by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire, there is an argument for removing the criminal damage aspect of the clause.

[Mr. Malins]

The Minister should note that the clause nevertheless contains two potentially troubling offences. First, it refers to

> "Using a public telecommunications system for sending a message known to be false in order to cause annoyance."

I assume—and I should know—that that does not cover bomb hoax calls, which are dealt with by separate legislation and are a very serious matter.

The sending of false messages by telephone can be nasty. I am trying to think of examples. Certainly, the act of knowingly giving a false alarm to a fire brigade can be serious. The inclusion of such offences in such a small provision is odd. It is hard to say whether it is over the top to suggest that such offences can be serious and ask whether they can be just as serious as, for example, the bottom end of the specified criminal damage offence or of section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986. I know from my colleagues on the stipendiary bench that they sometimes treat wasting police time or giving false report as very serious. I appreciate that the Minister intends that those offences should be suitable for a ticket only when they are at the bottom end of the scale. However, the wide-ranging nature of the issue means that it will involve the exercise of a certain amount of discretion by people whom I hope will be trained or adequately qualified to exercise it.

The Minister will know that what was then the metropolitan stipendiary bench was not consulted before the Bill was produced. That was extraordinary because 90 per cent. of all crime is tried in magistrates courts. The stipendiary bench, as it was, takes the lead in all crime in inner-city areas and, as he knows, is full of experts. It is too late to do anything about that now, but in future when he is consulting or discussing how the legislation is working I hope that he will not forget to consult that element of our judiciary.

Mr. Charles Clarke: First, I can give the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) a general assurance on future consultation of stipendiary magistrates. Secondly, I was remiss in not extending thanks to the people who served the Committee. I was unwilling to bring back to the House the memory of the disgraceful events at the end of the Committee, which brought Parliament, the Conservative party and the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) into such disrepute. I am sure that the country will be aware of that during the coming general election campaign. It is absolutely right to pay tribute to all those who helped us in Committee: the Clerks, Doorkeepers, *Hansard*, my officials in the Home Office who were assiduous throughout the process, and all members of the Committee.

I do not accept the criticisms about the lack of time to scrutinise this matter in the Chamber. We have discussed it on other occasions. On the substantive point made by the hon. Member for Woking, we are removing the two widest-ranging offences for the reasons that he gave. Each of the offences has some range and we shall have to see how the system works. I should perhaps remind the House that there is power to remove as well as to add offences to the table in clause 1 by subordinate legislation. I can give the commitment that he seeks: the Government will keep under close review all offences in the operation of this legislation. Subsequently, we will decide what further action we might take.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

Clause 17

CLOSURE OF CERTAIN LICENSED PREMISES DUE TO DISORDER OR DISTURBANCE

Lords amendment: No. 3, in page 9, line 12, after "of" insert "and related to".

Mr. Charles Clarke: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 4 to 7.

Mr. Clarke: These amendments would require that any disorder, or likely disorder, in the vicinity of the licensed premises must also be related to the premises in question before a closure order could be made on the ground that it is necessary in the interests of public safety.

This, again, was a matter that we debated at length in Committee. The various interests concerned have been assiduous in making their representations on the issue. The amendments were tabled by Lord Cope of Berkeley during the Committee stage in the other place. We took the view that they were unnecessary for reasons that I gave earlier. We accept the need for all the parties affected to be clear about the Bill and the case for making it absolutely clear that disorder or threat of disorder must relate to the premises in question before a closure order can be made.

The other four amendments make consequential changes to give effect to this change wherever similar tests must be applied by the courts and the police, for example when the police are deciding whether to extend a closure order. I hope that the House will agree the amendments.

Mr. Heald: The amendments were tabled in Committee in this House and in the other place, and I am delighted that they appear on the amendment paper today.

Those who keep public houses and licensed premises—the industry—accept that it may well be necessary to close rowdy premises at short notice. However, they were particularly concerned that that might happen when the likely disturbance or the disturbance occurring in the vicinity of the premises had nothing to do with their particular premises. A police officer might therefore believe that there would be trouble in an area and close the public house when its activities did not merit it.

The scope of the original wording was too wide to catch the badly run houses that cause serious disorder problems and put public safety at risk. We therefore welcome the fact that the Minister is prepared to accept the view of another place that the wording should be narrowed to relate the disorder that is in prospect, or that has occurred, to the premises.

I believe that the Minister made a vow not to mention the Committee stage and it was therefore a pity that he broke it. I defend my right hon. Friend the Member for

Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who did not act disgracefully. She took all the measures that were available to her to deal with circumstances in which democracy was at risk.

Mr. Simon Hughes: We welcome the amendments. The battle throughout our proceedings has been to restrict the powers that the Bill grants the authorities against the liberties of individuals and businesses. It was a perpetual theme of the Committee stage. A Labour Government, trying to be excessively authoritarian, had to justify themselves against all sorts of arguments. Some were made by Conservative Members, others by us and many by people outside the House. We tried to point out that the powers were simply unnecessary.

I put my neck on the block on Third Reading, and made it clear that, if a general election had taken place on 3 May, various clauses would not have been passed. I can say with authority, after conferring with colleagues in another place, that although we would have tabled amendments such as those that we are discussing, other amendments, such as Government proposals to extend curfews and to hold samples of DNA from people who were shown to be innocent would not have been accepted. The House of Lords would not have allowed the Bill to proceed. The month's delay has meant more time for debate in another place, where the Government argued that their proposals had been tested and were able to win votes. Consequently, the Bill has been allowed to proceed in its current form.

We were unable to win some of the big battles against a Government who have a majority in the House. They have a majority under our electoral system, but not in the country. We are therefore grateful for small victories. There was a danger of imposing closure orders on pubs for unrelated activities outside them. That is unacceptable. In a busy, built-up area such as the Old Kent road in my constituency, the police might take the view that some activities were causing disorder and intervene. If the amendments are accepted, closure orders can be imposed only if the prospective or actual disorder is "related to" the relevant pub. Pubs that keep good order will not be in trouble. That is progress. We wish that the Government had been more enlightened on other matters for which we would support a more liberal and less authoritarian regime.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 4 to 7 agreed to.

Clause 19

CLOSURE NOTICES

Lords amendment: No. 8, in page 17, line 3, after "being" insert ", or within the last 24 hours have been,"

Mr. Charles Clarke: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 9 to 14.

2.15 pm

Mr. Clarke: The amendments clarify that the power in clause 19 to issue closure notices can be used against premises, which, to the satisfaction of the police or the local authority, have been used for the unlicensed sale of intoxicating liquor at some time in the previous 24 hours.

As currently drafted, the relevant subsections of clause 19 could be interpreted to mean that a closure notice could be issued only if the use of the premises for the unlicensed sale of intoxicating liquor had continued until the notice was served. That restricted effect was not intended, especially as it would not cover cases where use did not continue when the police or the local authority wished to serve their notice, although it had occurred in the previous 24 hours and was more than likely to recur later.

The purpose of clauses 19 to 28 is to allow action against specific premises, where there is continuing offending or where offending has occurred in the past 24 hours. The amendments therefore make technical changes, which confirm that action may be taken when illegal use has occurred in a previous period of 24 hours. I hope that they will be agreed.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): We agree that the amendments clarify the Bill helpfully. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) and I repeatedly expressed our anxiety in Committee that some clauses, including those that we are considering, had been too hastily drafted. The Minister will acknowledge that several concessions that the Government made in another place and that he is confirming today are a response to the anxieties that we and people in the licensed trade have repeatedly expressed.

Many clauses have been drafted too quickly. We have used nearly half the time, which is too short, that has been allocated to consider the long list of amendments. That means that we are again rushing matters through with almost indecent haste. We shall consider matters that are even more significant later, and I therefore do not wish to detain the House for long.

The Government have belatedly acknowledged that, as we suggested in Committee, the aspect that we are considering was not sufficiently clear. We are pleased that the Government have accepted, at this late stage, that the drafting needed improving, as we consistently said.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), but I want to make a further point. It is important that society clamps down on alcohol abuse, and abuse by those who are licensed to sell alcohol of the terms and conditions whereby they are permitted to do that. Alcohol is a major cause of crime. The Government acknowledge that; there is no disagreement between the parties about the matter.

Drugs—alcohol is a drug—often cause serious, especially violent crime. It is therefore appropriate to do all that we can to ensure that those who lawfully buy and sell alcohol act within the law. I hope that we shall continue to be vigilant to ensure that alcohol abuse does not continue to the same extent, with the terrible consequences that society currently suffers.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 9 to 14 agreed to.

After Clause 37

Lords amendment: No. 15, to insert the following new clause—***Permitting use of controlled drugs on premises***—

For paragraph (d) of section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (c. 38) (offence of knowingly permitting cannabis, cannabis resin or prepared opium to be smoked on premises) there shall be substituted—

"(d) administering or using a controlled drug which is unlawfully in any person's possession at or immediately before the time when it is administered or used.""

Mr. Charles Clarke: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 39.

Mr. Clarke: The amendment to section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 would facilitate police action against closed drug markets, such as crack houses. Under the 1971 Act, it is currently an offence for the occupier or manager of premises knowingly to allow illegal drugs to be produced or supplied on them. However, liability for the use of illegal drugs extends only to smoking cannabis or opium. That reflects the drug misuse patterns that prevailed when the Act was introduced. We believe that Lords amendment No. 15 will play an important part in updating the powers available to the police and the courts in tackling drug abuse, and it is supported by the police.

As we argued both on Report and in Committee, we felt that the change was not necessary. However, the official Opposition did not accept that view either on the Floor of the House or in private discussions that I had with the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). In the light of concerns about a lack of clarity in the legislation, we decided that it would be better to accept Lords amendment No. 15 than to have a rather arcane discussion about the legalisms involved in the particular circumstances. Consequently, both in the other place and in this place, we have accepted the amendment, which we hope will have the effects that have been widely advertised.

Mr. Hawkins: I am very glad that the Minister expressed his concession as he did. The amendment is the result of a very long-running campaign by the official Opposition which has been led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and, in another place, by my noble Friend Lord Cope. My noble friends Baroness Buscombe and Baroness Hanham also have continued to press the Government on the issue.

We knew all along, as the Minister has very fairly conceded today, that the police were desperate for an amendment to the 1971 Act that enabled them particularly to clamp down on crack houses. As my noble Friend Baroness Buscombe said:

"These amendments represent the closing of a frustrating, glaring loophole in the law given the now sadly prevalent use of crack cocaine by illegal drug users."

My noble Friend also mentioned the fact that, back on 23 January, Baroness Hanham had

"laid down a challenge to the Government to crack down on crack houses."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 1 May 2001; Vol. 624, c. 1759.]

A moment ago, in our previous debate, I mentioned some important amendments that have to be made to the Bill, and Lords amendment No. 15 is one of the most important of them. All of us know, and police are particularly aware, that crack cocaine is one of the most dangerously addictive illegal drugs. Very sadly, crack houses have become increasingly prevalent in our society, especially in inner cities and town centres.

The Opposition have been surprised that it has taken the Government so long to accept our arguments on this vital issue. Nevertheless, there is even greater joy in heaven over a sinner who repenteth. Even at the 59th minute of the 11th hour of this Parliament, the Government's acceptance of our view is welcome. We think that the amendment will add a strong weapon to the police's armoury in dealing with one of our society's most important scourges—illegal drugs, and particularly crack cocaine, which is one of the most dangerous.

I therefore welcome the Government's concession, although I wish that they had made it a great deal earlier. Nevertheless, even at the last minute, it is greatly to be welcomed.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Liberal Democrat Members welcome Lords amendment No. 15. I have just one question for the Minister which I hope that he will be good enough to answer. It seems that the amendment would not only achieve its main purpose of making crack house activity illegal, but that it could change the law to legalise other activities that currently are illegal. Is that so? I ask the question simply because the offence was previously defined as

"knowingly permitting cannabis, cannabis resin or prepared opium to be smoked on premises",

and that definition is being changed to encompass different types of activity.

Mr. Clarke: Reflecting on the question, as the hon. Gentleman asked it, and quickly taking advice from colleagues, I think that I can confirm that the amendment does not have the effect that he fears it might have.

Mr. Hughes: It was a neutral question and did not express a view. I simply wanted to ensure that the Government's understanding was that the amendment will extend the remit of the 1971 Act without reducing the provision in other spheres. I appreciate that I asked the question without providing notice of it, and I would be grateful if the Minister would place on the record any advice that he might receive on it. It is important that we are clear on the issue.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 41

POLICE DIRECTIONS STOPPING THE HARASSMENT ETC. OF A PERSON IN HIS HOME

Lords amendment: No. 16, in page 2, line 22, leave out "victim" and insert "resident"

Mr. Clarke: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 17 to 22.

Mr. Clarke: The origin of this group of amendments, which are essentially identical, was concerns expressed in Committee in the other place by the Opposition, who suggested that the person concerned should be described as a target rather than as a victim. We felt that the precedent for use of the word victim lay in its use in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Having given further consideration to how to try to meet the concerns expressed by the Opposition in the other place, we feel that the word resident is a better choice than either the word victim or the word target. We do not believe that the change would have an impact on the effect of the clause.

We believe that the change will provide a higher level of objectivity in the terminology that is being used. Specifically, it will take account of the sensitivities of those who are subject to such harassment and may well not wish to be defined as victims because of the association of the word victims with particular circumstances. Consequently, we propose to replace the word victim with the word resident in this group of amendments.

Mr. Heald: We are content with Lords amendment No. 16. I should say that the concerns expressed in the House on Second Reading about events at Huntingdon Life Sciences have been dealt with in the Bill. Amendments to the Bill allow the Malicious Communications Act 1988 to be tightened up and enable directors to register their addresses confidentially. Other provisions deal with the practice of besetting people's homes. Amendment No. 16 deals with one of those matters.

It is good that both sides of the House have agreed on the need to tackle the issue and that it has been possible to make progress. However, the official Opposition cannot take the credit for this group of amendments, as they address a Liberal Democrat issue that was raised first, in Committee, by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), and later, in the other place, by Lord Phillips. They should take the credit for the amendments, with which we are happy.

Mr. Miller: I should like simply to press my hon. Friend the Minister on the use of language in the clause. Definitions are sometimes extremely difficult. I suppose that it is pretty obvious to individuals when we are victims, although it may not always be entirely obvious to the courts. Is my hon. Friend happy that the full spirit of the original clause is encompassed by use of the word resident? Does the word encompass only permanent residents, or does it include, for example, those who are temporarily resident in a dwelling or legitimately resident in an hotel room? Are all those potential circumstances covered to his satisfaction in the Bill?

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman might be assisted by considering the points that my noble Friend Lord Cope made—on 1 May 2001, at column 1782 of the House of Lords *Official Report*—when he asked about using the word resident, victim, target or person in the clause. The official Opposition in the other place suggested using the word person. The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting and important point. We want to ensure that the clause in its final form is workable, so that those who are doing that very important scientific work are properly protected.

Mr. Miller: I am speaking in the debate because of the type of English that the hon. Gentleman has just used. Although I am used to dealing with scientific terms, in the Bill we are addressing much more complex definitional issues. I am merely seeking to determine whether my hon. Friend the Minister is satisfied that the intention of the clause will be the same as when it contained the word victim, and that it will operate similarly in all circumstances in which a person is a victim in a dwelling. It would be helpful to clarify the issue.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I can give the hon. Gentleman a response, although it is not yet the official Government response. It may be shorter than he anticipated.

Mr. Heald: Yesterday, I was able to ask the hon. Gentleman whether it was a coincidence that the Prime Minister had visited his constituency on Tuesday and he had a red box with him during our debate in Westminster Hall yesterday. Now he seems to be telling us that he is about to form a Government. He is obviously having a good week, but I do not think that he should let the fact that Millwall won 5-0 last Saturday go to his head.

Mr. Hughes: In reverse order: the Millwall victory that sent the Lions roaring into the first division is entirely to be commended; the red box yesterday was entirely coincidental as it was supplied by my office with some letters for me to sign, but it was good practice. I should also put it on the record that no deal has been reached between the Liberal Democrats and any other party before the general election. Lastly, the Prime Minister made a terrible error of judgment by coming to the school and making a speech over the heads of the young people. It may have lost him the votes of many of the parents at that school, but that is to be seen.

Mr. Miller: What was the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) doing?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There has been quite some latitude. Will hon. Members get back to the subject of the debate?

2.30 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I understand that the hon. Gentleman was at a primary school with the Leader of the Liberal Democrats that very afternoon.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I shall respond briefly to the hon. Gentleman and tell him that we spoke to the pupils rather than ignoring them.

The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) made an important point about the wording and I am grateful for his attribution to my noble Friend Lord Phillips of Sudbury. There was a debate about what the right wording should be. The term "victim" was deemed inappropriate because it prejudges the outcome of the complaint and that clearly would be wrong. The term that had been used in the past was "person" and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that it is used in other statutes. However, I think that we can get away with using the word resident although it is not necessarily the best word. My understanding is that it does not cover only those who are permanently at an address, but anyone who is there at the time. Of course it would not cover someone who was there for a matter of moments and that may be a weakness. It may therefore be that we need to give the matter more consideration. The reason it is right to change the wording is that it is wrong to prejudge the outcome of the complaint.

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

The legislation received wide support across the House and, as the Minister and his colleagues were at pains to point out, it gives the police a discretionary power in respect of certain activities. We look to the police to be wise in their discretion because there is a need to get the balance right between allowing lawful protest on the one hand and preventing intimidatory and improper protest on the other. The second should be outlawed, but absolutely not the first.

Mr. Charles Clarke: To respond briefly to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), I am advised that we consider that the amendments do not change the effect of the clause and the reasons advanced by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) are right. It covers any protests outside residential premises, anywhere being used as a dwelling, but it does not include hotels, for reasons that we discussed in Committee. We are satisfied with this and I hope that I have reassured my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston. I hope that the House will accept the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 17 to 22 agreed to.

After Clause 44

Lords amendment: No. 23, to insert the following new clause—*Placing of advertisement relating to prostitution*—

(1) A person commits an offence if—

(a) he places on, or in the immediate vicinity of, a public telephone an advertisement relating to prostitution, and

(b) he does so with the intention that the advertisement should come to the attention of any other person or persons.

(2) For the purposes of this section, an advertisement is an advertisement relating to prostitution if it—

(a) is for the services of a prostitute, whether male or female; or

(b) indicates that premises are premises at which such services are offered.

(3) In any proceedings for an offence under this section, any advertisement which a reasonable person would consider to be an advertisement relating to prostitution shall be presumed to be such an advertisement unless it is shown not to be.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, or both.

(5) In this section—

"public telephone" means—

(a) any telephone which is located in a public place and made available for use by the public, or a section of the public, and

(b) where such a telephone is located in or on, or attached to, a kiosk, booth, acoustic hood, shelter or other structure, that structure; and

"public place" means any place to which the public have or are permitted to have access, whether on payment or otherwise, other than—

(a) any place to which children under the age of 16 years are not permitted to have access, whether by law or otherwise, and

(b) any premises which are wholly or mainly used for residential purposes.

(6) In section 24 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (c.60) (arrest without warrant for arrestable offences), in subsection (2) (offences which are arrestable offences), after paragraph (c) insert-

"(ca) an offence under section (*Placing of advertisement relating to prostitution*) of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001;"."

Mr. Charles Clarke: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 24.

Mr. Clarke: I shall devote a few moments to presenting this important new clause, which carries the support of the House. The two new clauses would make it an arrestable criminal offence to place prostitutes' cards in telephone boxes.

To combat any changes in advertising strategy that result from attempts to circumvent the new offence, the new clauses would allow the Secretary of State to extend the provisions to cover other street furniture.

Let me pay public tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), who was motivated by events in her constituency to introduce a private Member's Bill. She has been a consistent campaigner on these matters, with general support across the House. The Government have long agreed with the policy ambitions set out in the new clause, but we did not feel that we had enough space to include them in the Bill. As the matter was pressed in the other place and because we have no policy disagreement with the provisions, we are glad to agree to the Lords amendment and to commend it to the House today.

Prostitutes' cards in telephone boxes are a matter on which there has long been concern, which is reflected in the two new clauses. The cards are often explicit. They can be seen by children and can obscure important information, such as advertisements for Childline and the Samaritans. They are offensive and intimidating to those who use public telephones. They are part of the increasingly organised business of prostitution and can advertise young people involved in prostitution and, importantly, those trafficked for sexual exploitation.

The individuals who are paid to place the cards can be intimidating, threatening and sometimes violent to members of the public and those employed to clean the telephone boxes. Telephone companies incur great expense in removing the cards while losing revenue from legitimate advertising.

We recognise that the problem is at present confined to specific areas, such as central London and Brighton. It is also a serious issue in my Norwich constituency. However, it is a very serious problem. Every week, British Telecom removes some 150,000 cards from its 700 telephone boxes in central London. It is also a growing problem, which is why the offence would apply nationally. The offence would be committed by any person who places what a reasonable person would consider to be an advertisement relating to prostitution in a public telephone box.

We are confident that the definition is sufficiently robust to cover advertisements that imply that the services of prostitutes are available without making this explicit on the face of the card. Equally, in the exceptional case where a person has naively put up an advertisement which appears to be for prostitution, but is genuinely shown not to be criminal, liability will not follow.

The offence will attract a power of arrest. This will enable the police to take swift action to stop this nuisance occurring. Those convicted of the offence will face a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment and/or a level 5 fine. The level of penalty reflects the serious nature of the nuisance caused by the cards and our determination to prevent the individuals concerned from blighting the lives of those who live in the areas affected.

We recognise that those behind organised prostitution will seek to circumvent any legislation that we introduce. That is why the second new clause gives the Secretary of State a power to extend the legislation to cover other types of public structures, such as bus shelters, by affirmative resolution.

Finally, I should note that although this amendment is an important part of tackling the problem, there are other measures that can complement legislation. Oftel has had talks with the telecommunications industry about a call barring scheme and will develop further proposals in consultation with the industry. Part of the agreement with the industry is that we will do what we can in legislation and the industry will do what it can on the technological side.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Minister told us that the penalty would be a level 5 fine and a maximum of six months' imprisonment. He said that that demonstrated the Government's view of the seriousness of the crime. Can he give us some examples of other crimes for which the penalty is a level 5 fine and six months' imprisonment?

Mr. Clarke: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that information off the cuff. One of the pieces of advice that I have given myself—and usually taken—is not to give off-the-cuff information across the Floor of the House as it might not be well-informed. However, we take the matter extremely seriously, particularly the trafficking in people for prostitution. There is a whole range of other offences that are designed to deal with people who traffic in migrants in that way.

I commend the amendments to the House. They are an important step forward that will help communities work in a more effective way.

Mr. Heald: The amendments were moved in the other place by the noble Baroness Buscombe, and I would like to pay tribute to the campaign that she and others have waged on the issue. Westminster city council was particularly concerned about this issue, which has also concerned hon. Members for many years. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) will recall that Olga Maitland also campaigned on the issue—

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): She will be back, in Sutton and Cheam.

Mr. Heald: I am told that she is coming back to represent Sutton and Cheam and that will certainly be a happy moment.

The concern that prompted the amendment was that people in areas such as Brighton and Hove, and central London, should not have to be confronted with sordid images when they are simply trying to make a telephone call. It is also expensive for an organisation such as British Telecom, which spends £250,000 a year clearing the cards from its 1,000 boxes in central London. The measure will allow people to make telephone calls without being pestered in that way.

It is right that relatively serious penalties should be applied, for the reasons that the Minister mentioned. Those who are involved in the trade are often making considerable sums of money. If there are persistent offenders who, time and again, place cards in boxes and will not learn their lesson, tough penalties should be available to deal with them.

Mr. Simon Hughes: We agree strongly with the need to take action on this activity. It is offensive that every phone box in London is littered with such cards. As the Minister said, it is bad enough for the mass of the population, but it is particularly offensive to many women and inappropriate and unsuitable for children, as well as being unhelpful. We need to protect the public interest, albeit in what is technically private space. I am glad to hear that the private telephone companies are also taking their share of the work.

I hope that when the police take action, with the support of local authorities such as Westminster, which has been assiduous in the matter, they will concentrate not on the runners—the people who are paid a bit of pocket money to put the cards in the phone boxes—but on the people who are making a lot of money behind the scenes. They are the big fish who need to be caught because they make a lot of money exploiting people in the sex trade.

We must also revisit the wider debate. We are living a fiction in this country about prostitution. Like abortion, it has always happened and will always happen. If we delude ourselves into thinking that the present laws against it will stop it, we will deceive the public whom we are here to represent. It is right to deal with the issue of the cards in this Bill, but I hope that whichever party or parties are in government after the election, they will be brave enough to reconsider the law on prostitution.

Lords amendment No. 23 agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 24 agreed to.

Part 2

Lords amendment: No. 25, Leave out Part 2.

Mr. Charles Clarke: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 36 to 38, 40 and 41.

Mr. Clarke: Amendments Nos. 25 and 41 will have the effect of removing part 2, on information disclosure for the purposes of criminal proceedings, from the Bill. Amendment No. 36 is a drafting amendment consequential on the removal of the words in amendment No. 37, which is consequential on the removal of part 2 from the Bill. Amendments Nos. 38 and 40 are also consequential.

[Mr. Clarke]

This is the first group of amendments to be considered today with which the Government disagree, but we accept them under force majeure of the balance of the parties in the other place.

Mr. Heald: I am somewhat surprised by the Minister's remarks, because Lord Bassam said that he was happy to be associated with the amendments. He also complimented Lord Cope on the cogent way in which he had expressed the Opposition's view on the Bill. Lord Bassam also admitted that the Government's proposals required better and more detailed evaluation. He certainly seemed to say that he did not disagree with the amendments.

2.45 pm

Mr. Clarke: My noble Friend Lord Bassam was trying to pay tribute to the way in which Front Benchers had tried to work together to reach solutions in everybody's interest. However, on the substance of policy, we do not agree with two groups of amendments before us today—the current group and the other on clause 126, which deals with police conduct. We will accept the amendments because of our desire to get the whole Bill through.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The amendments were jointly tabled by the Government and the official Opposition in the other place. Is it in order for the Minister to resile from them?

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): The Minister can do anything.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is entirely a matter for the Minister in charge of the Bill.

Mr. Clarke: I am trying to express the Government's position as clearly as I can. Part 2 would have implemented Government policy to improve the ability of public authorities to disclose information for the purposes of criminal investigations or proceedings. That is an important part of the Government's overall strategy in the fight against crime and it is why I am disappointed that those clauses are being removed.

Given the short time available to complete the parliamentary stages of the Bill, we have decided to give further scrutiny to that part of the legislation. If the Government are re-elected, we will consider the best way to proceed with those useful reforms and how to use other legislative vehicles to do so.

Mr. Hawkins: I am afraid that we have just seen a most extraordinary approach to the amendments by the Minister, who seeks to reject everything that Lord Bassam said in jointly tabling the amendments with the official Opposition in the other place. It simply is not good enough for a Minister in the Lords to table amendments jointly with the Opposition and then for this Minister to say that the Government do not really agree with them. The House will also have noted the attitude of the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall), who said a moment ago that the Minister could do anything. That has been the approach of the Government for the past four years and it is why they will be turfed out of office on 7 June. They have demonstrated contempt for the principles of democracy and the Minister cannot get away with saying that the Government are accepting the amendments only under force majeure in the other place—

Mr. Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No, because the Minister is trying to resile from what Lord Bassam said in jointly tabling the amendments and accepting the Government's defeat on amendment No. 35. I have made the point repeatedly that we have had inadequate time to debate the Government's concessions and, with only two minutes left this afternoon, it is indisputable that the Government have had to abandon the whole of part 2 as a result of these jointly tabled amendments.

Mr. Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No, I will not give way because time is short. The reason why that is happening is that Lord Bassam said as recently as yesterday in the other place:

> "we have jointly tabled the amendment seeking to remove Part 2 of the Bill."

Mr. Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No. I have told the Minister that I will not give way because the Government have given us so little time. Lord Bassam continued—

Mr. Clarke: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to ask the hon. Gentleman to quote the whole statement made by my noble Friend in the other place?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Hawkins: The Minister was premature in his intervention, because I proposed to continue the quotation. Lord Bassam said:

> "This will provide a period of time in which, no doubt, we can improve the quality of the legislation, if that is what is required, and perhaps undertake further consultations."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 May 2001; Vol. 624, c. 2173.]

Mr. Clarke: That is not the whole sentence.

Mr. Hawkins: That is the whole sentence. The Minister cannot get away from the fact that the amendments were tabled jointly—

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Lords amendment No. 25 agreed to [Special Entry].

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendments Nos. 26 to 43 agreed to.

International Criminal Court Bill *[Lords]* (Programme) (No. 2)

2.51 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. John Battle): I beg to move,

That the Order of 3rd April 2001 (International Criminal Court Bill *[Lords]* (Programme)) shall be varied as follows:—

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Order shall be omitted.

2. Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at today's sitting and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order.

The purpose of the Bill is to enable the Government to ratify the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court. The Bill was discussed in another place before it came to this House for debate in Committee. That debate was excellent, and the Bill is in good shape.

In Committee, we discussed 58 of the amendments tabled by the Opposition, and only six were not debated. Our considerations gave rise to substantial and high-quality debate.

Some of the matters tabled for consideration this afternoon have been discussed at all stages of the Bill so far. However, I am confident that we can deal with them in the time allowed, and that we can continue to work constructively on the details of the Bill. I am pleased that we are discussing it today, and I hope that we can make further good progress in the time remaining.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) said in Committee on 1 May that quite good progress had been made on the Bill. I think that that is right; in my experience of the House, the quality of debate in Committee was exceptional.

The motion is not merely a result of the fact that we are caught up in the timetable dictated by the Dissolution of Parliament. The Bill has to go through Parliament now so that Britain can be one of the first 60 states to ratify the Rome statute. We have been involved in shaping that statute from the outset, a process that has taken years, and our officials worked hard on its original provisions. We want to sign up early so that we can remain in a position to shape the International Criminal Court.

Finally, much interest in the Bill has been expressed by non-governmental organisations such as the International Red Cross, and they have said that they want the Bill to go ahead. There has been almost universal support—including among Opposition Members—for the principles of the Bill, although I understand that some Opposition Back-Bench Members are still not comfortable with the position adopted by their Front-Bench colleagues.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Correct.

Mr. Battle: The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) says that that is correct, but the matter is one for those on the Opposition Front Bench to sort out, not me.

My point is that NGOs and other bodies outside the House with an interest in the matter have been assiduous in making representations. We have taken those representations seriously, and I hope that those bodies feel that we have taken many of their considerations on board.

2.53 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I must inform the Minister that Conservative Front-Bench Members do not sort out our Back-Bench colleagues, but allow them to speak their minds as and when they wish. Not for one minute would I seek to impose my views on a piece of legislation, or those of other Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, on independent-minded and responsible Back Benchers. The Minister may think that we act in the same way as the Labour party so obviously does with regard to its members, but I must disabuse him.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene, and for her typical generosity of spirit. Following her guidance, I hope that I shall be able to exercise a small degree of independence.

Does my hon. Friend agree with the Minister's apparent contention that, when a body called an NGO expresses a view about a matter, that legitimises an amendment to legislation in this House? Members of Parliament are here to make our own judgment about what is right and what is wrong. We should take account of what NGOs say, but those organisation should not by any means have the first or last word on a matter.

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend is right. Non-governmental organisations play an important role in making representations, and we should listen to them carefully. Where we find merit in the points that they put forward, we should pursue them.

Indeed, it was a great shame that the Government did not listen more carefully to some of the representations made to them. We were forced to table amendments to the Bill in Committee so that matters proposed by well meaning and interested parties could be discussed. It was a great shame that the Minister could not persuade the Government to take into consideration the views of the much vaunted NGOs on which he seeks to rely.

I am most disappointed that, on what is in effect the final day of this Parliament, the House should be faced with a programme motion on this Bill. The Minister moved a programme motion in the House on 3 April, at the beginning of proceedings on the Bill. He gave the undertaking then that consideration on Report and Third Reading would fall within a certain time frame, but today's motion goes back on that undertaking.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Does not it follow that the Minister not only did not listen to representations from NGOs, but that he did not listen to what he said to himself?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. and learned Friend is right. The Minister is well meaning, but I am afraid that he gets forced into moving in certain directions. This motion is a case in point. It is reprehensible to timetable the Bill at this stage, and it means that he has gone back on his original promise.

I am disappointed with the motion for several reasons. As the Minister knows, I disapprove in principle of such motions, and of the way in which they have been used during this Parliament. I shall return to that matter later.

[Mrs. Gillan]

I am especially disappointed because of what the Minister said in his opening remarks on the first day of our Committee deliberations. He said:

> "The Bill is sizeable, legally complex and technical. Its purpose, as was made clear in the excellent Second Reading debate, is to enable Britain to sign up properly to the Rome statute on the International Criminal Court."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 10 April 2001; c. 3.]

The Bill is extremely complex and technical, and requires detailed scrutiny. Consideration in Committee lasted for 25 hours—less the time spent finding a Chairman for one of our sittings—and that allowed us to touch on some of the topics. However, we were not able to touch on all the proposals that might have improved the Bill.

The Bill was far from perfect, despite a very rapid scrutiny process in another place, and Government amendments had to be tabled. Even after a so-called consultation process, the Bill remained imperfect. Today's programme motion shows how the Government have treated the Bill with disrespect and disregard.

Mr. Battle: It is worth reminding the House that the Opposition said that four issues should be debated in Committee—the seven-year opt-out, discretion over warrants, command responsibility and declarations on ratification. Only one of those items was not discussed.

In Committee, our discussion covered subjects as diverse as the European Court of Human Rights, the aggressive situation developing between China and Taiwan, the Lockerbie trial, Diego Garcia, NATO's action in Kosovo, no-fly zones in Iraq, corruption at the Olympics, the politicisation of the ICC, the means of electing ICC personnel, Israel, the Falklands dispute, parliamentary scrutiny of treaties, the Pinochet question, peace talks and face-to-face diplomacy, Angola, nuclear weapons and the history of the law of war.

I should have hoped that that variety of topics might be seen as offering a sufficient range of debate in Committee, but we accept that some matters remain that the Opposition want to raise.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that the whole point of this stage of consideration of a Bill is to allow those who were not privileged to serve on the Standing Committee to contribute to the debate and table amendments, and that to quote what happened in Committee is an utter irrelevance at this stage?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): We are, in fact, discussing a programme motion.

Mrs. Gillan: The Minister makes my point for me. This is a complex Bill which involves serious issues, not a simple look at a proposed statute. It involves discussing the concepts around the Bill, its implications and outcomes. The Minister's list makes my case that the legislation deserves full scrutiny.

Mr. Garnier: In his catalogue of matters discussed in Committee, the Minister did not mention the hobby horse that I exercised quite frequently. I refer to the way in which Parliament is wholly incapable, under our constitutional arrangements, of amending treaties or gaining any legislative purchase on a treaty that is made by the Government, as the Executive. Other right hon. and hon. Members may not realise that the exercise that we went through in Committee was largely Ruritanian, in that we could achieve very little in persuading the Government that what they may have done in signing up to the treaty was not perfect.

Will my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) draw to the attention of the House the huge constitutional implications involved in passing the Bill today? We are handing over to an extra-territorial body—not the United Nations or the European Union, but a court—constitutional powers that properly belong to this Chamber.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. and learned Friend has made valid points that have been repeated at several stages during the Committee's proceedings, and I feel sure that when he moves amendments in his own right from the Front Bench, he will add to them. He is right. We are putting on to the statute book our agreement to a treaty. From debates in Committee, it seems to be a pick-and-mix affair. The Government could pick and choose bits from the treaty that they wanted to include in the legislation and disregard other parts. Those matters deserve a great deal of scrutiny. In considering something that is so long term, with such vast constitutional implications, we owe it to the electorate to do our job properly by scrutinising the Bill and making sure that we have examined everything in detail.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) made a profound point. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) agree that its significance is heightened by our knowledge that under the Standing Orders of this House, there is a prohibition on the tabling of oral questions that seek Ministers' exegesis of treaty articles? Does that not underline how crucial it is to have adequate time this afternoon for proper consideration, for once this afternoon's opportunity has passed, there might be no other?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. It adds weight to the discussions on the programming motion and backs up our objections.

Some Labour Members have said that our attitude to the Bill means that we are opposed to the International Criminal Court. We are no such thing. Conservative Front-Bench Members have consistently said that they support the principles behind the Bill, and who would not? However, we would be failing in our duty if we did not scrutinise the Bill properly. I think that, in all honesty, the Minister agrees with me on that fundamental point.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gillan: There is not much time on this programme motion, and I know that some of my colleagues wish to speak. I would like to take up some of the points that the Minister made in moving the programming motion. The hon. Gentleman will have his opportunity later.

Some of the Minister's arguments about the programming of this stage of the Bill are utter rubbish. He says that he wants Britain to be among the first 60 countries to sign up to the statute, so it is desperately important to get the Bill on to the statute book now. If it was so desperately important, why did nothing happen after the Foreign Secretary—who is not in his place—said on 20 July 1998 that we would be among the first 60 countries to ratify the statute? That is an example of the Labour party saying one thing and doing another.

From 20 July 1998 onwards, the Foreign Secretary and his Ministers could easily have introduced legislation in this House and had a perfectly adequate period of time in which to discuss it. On 27 October 1999—more than a year later—I called for legislation to be brought forward so that the House could do its job properly, scrutinise it over a long period of time and get it right, but I am afraid that nothing happened.

Mr. Battle: Will the hon. Lady acknowledge that we allowed, from the outset, a long period of consultation so that all parties could give their views on the Bill?

Mrs. Gillan: The Minister must have a selective memory. The consultation process on the Bill took place largely during the recess. I wrote to the Foreign Secretary complaining about the short time available. The Government suddenly woke up to the fact that they had done nothing about this, and that it was one of their do-gooding poses.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The motion before the House is not about consultation but about the programme and the time for consideration.

Mrs. Gillan: I am sorry if I am stepping outside the bounds of the programming motion, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the Minister raised it on an intervention, and I think it right to put the House straight on the consultation process if he is claiming that it was a contributory factor in cutting short the scrutiny of the Bill at this stage. Despite repeated calls from this side of the House for the legislation to be introduced in short order, nothing happened. There was complete inaction.

The motion does not surprise me. It fits into the Government's pattern of falling back on what used to be the guillotine and is now the programming process. At this stage of the Parliament, it is worth recalling that in this Session, 22 Bills have been programmed in this House. Only four have not been programmed—three consolidated fund measures, which go through on one day, and a capital allowances measure. The Government are willing to continue to subscribe to the stifling of debate on important matters such as the scrutiny of the Bill without caring a fig. The Minister shakes his head, but he does not care a fig.

Because Conservative Front-Bench Members, who have spoken on this matter consistently over the past two or three years, have asked for legislation to be introduced, there have been plenty of opportunities for the Minister to discuss it with us and negotiate its passage. Yet the Government brought the Bill forward at the eleventh hour, when they knew full well that they would be calling a general election. It was foot and mouth disease that diverted the date of the election. The Government chose to bring the Bill forward in the House of Lords, with the intention that it would receive no scrutiny whatever in this House. It is only by virtue of the great disaster that has befallen our farming industry that the Bill was able to have a Committee stage. The Government's disregard for the legislation is reprehensible.

The Minister said that Britain needs to be among the first 60 to ratify the statute. This year, only two countries have done so—Andorra and Argentina. One of the reasons for guillotining proceedings on the Bill may be so that we can be among the top 60, but there are still 30 countries to go. Today, I received a read-out showing the rate at which countries are ratifying the treaty: it is not with great rapidity. The Minister cannot, therefore, deploy that argument in his favour at this stage.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): We need an International Criminal Court for the same reason that I have to go to Scotland yard in half an hour to discuss bringing Iraqi war criminals to justice—because no such court is in being. The faster that we can set up the court, the better it will be for the sufferers of torture, of crimes against humanity, of genocide and so on. That is why I urge the hon. Lady to give the Bill full speed.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady is well known for her good work and I hope that her meeting goes well. However, the absence of an International Criminal Court has not prevented criminals from being brought to justice. There were tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. The court will be a vehicle whereby people can be brought to justice. Let us face the facts, however: the hon. Lady knows that, given the programme motion and the Government's railroading attitude, of course the measure will be passed. I should like an International Criminal Court—I make no bones about that—but I do not see why I should roll over and accept the Government's imperfect proposals which do not offer the protections needed for our citizens, especially our armed services personnel.

There is no point in introducing half measures. Once a measure is on the statute book, it is in the statute book, so we have a duty to work on the proposals, in the House, in a timely and proper fashion—not in a rushed way, at the fag end of a Parliament. I hope that the Government are swept from power at the election, that we return to office and can consider the measure properly. We will bring common sense to bear on it.

Other hon. Members want to speak. I willingly put on record the fact that the programme motion is disgraceful. The Government have constantly eroded democracy and this measure is a flagship for that erosion. The Bill should have been negotiated between the Front Benches and should have been discussed during the body of a Parliament—not slipped in, slyly, at the end. We shall vote against the motion as a protest.

3.12 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Normally, I am not keen on programme motions; Parliament ought to have the opportunity to discuss legislation in detail. However, it must be obvious, even to Opposition Members, that Parliament is about to be dissolved and that an election is coming—perhaps they have not heard about that—so if the Bill is to become law, it has to go through today. The matter is as simple as that: therefore, there is to be a programme motion.

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

I am one of the Labour Back Benchers who has occasionally been forced to raise differences of opinion with Front-Bench Members—my Whip, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) is laughing—[HON. MEMBERS: "No, he is not!"] Perhaps he is taking notes—no doubt for future commendation—. I have tabled amendments, but I am intrigued by the contribution made by the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). It is ground-breaking, it is mind-blowing—it is galactic. He seems to be saying that it is time to bring the royal prerogative under parliamentary scrutiny. If that is so, I am delighted and—given the absence, tragically, of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) in the next Parliament—if the hon. and learned Gentleman is re-elected, he and I can no doubt promote a Bill to bring the royal prerogative under parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Garnier: I dare say that the hon. Gentleman and I will not often agree. In Standing Committee, I taxed the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) with the issue that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) addresses and mentioned the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). It is outrageous that Parliament should have no purchase whatever on the treaty-making prerogative of the Government. Earlier in the debate, Labour Members tittered when I used the word "sovereign": they thought that I was talking about the Queen, but I was talking about this Government. It is essential that a Parliament dominated by the Executive, thanks to their supine majority, should not be allowed to make treaties on behalf of the public without Members of the House of Commons having some say in the matter. At least on this occasion, I am glad to be in some agreement with the hon. Member for Islington, North.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind all hon. Members of the wording of the motion that we are discussing.

Mr. Corbyn: The problem with the programme motion is that it does not allow sufficient time for the hon. and learned Member for Harborough and me to table motions to bring the royal prerogative under parliamentary scrutiny. Had there been sufficient time, we could no doubt have raised that issue.

The important point is that if a Government—good, bad or indifferent—sign international treaties, a Parliament should have the right to deal with those treaties in detail. We can deal only with consequential legislation, not the substance of the treaties. For an accountable Parliament and for accountable democracy, that issue must be revisited in future Parliaments. That is most important.

If the Bill is passed today, we shall be among the first 60 countries to ratify the treaty. That will mean that the court can be established and begin work. I hope that we are among those countries and that the court does start working. I look forward to the Minister's comments, either in response to this short debate or later in the Bill's proceedings. I hope that there will be a process whereby we can review the operation of the court, the appointment of its judges—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going rather wide of the wording of the motion.

Mr. Corbyn: Once again, time is the problem, Madam Deputy Speaker. The programme motion would not allow us to discuss the points I was outlining. However, I am sure that the Minister will want to deal with them.

Some of the proposals to be debated under the motion relate to the wish—in some cases unstated, although it is more overt in others—that the ICC should apply to everyone except us. The principle of a treaty is that a degree of sovereignty is ceded to another body. I am, therefore, concerned that some of the amendments would increase the discretion available to Ministers, either in this country or elsewhere, as to whether to proceed with cases. I wish that there was sufficient time to debate my view: there should be much less discretion, or none whatever. Surely, that is the principle of universal jurisdiction that lies behind the measure.

We have only a short time to consider eight or nine groups of amendments. I hope that we have time to discuss all of them, but above all, I hope that the measure is passed. It will deal with the difficulties that many of us faced while trying to secure justice in an international tribunal for victims in places where was no special process. There was such a process for Nazi Germany; there is one for Rwanda and for the former Yugoslavia. However, there was no special process for Chile and Cambodia and in many, many cases throughout the world.

However serious we are about eliminating the main perpetrators of murder, human rights abuses and terrorism against whole civilian populations, we must acknowledge that the passage of the Bill will not solve all those problems. However, at least it is a step forward and offers a forum in which some of the worst perpetrators of human rights abuses can be brought to justice. I hope that we achieve that today.

3.18 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The position of programme motions in this Parliament has advanced rapidly. I approve of this one. In the light of the imminent election, it is certainly necessary to give effect to the clear will of Parliament—as expressed from the Front Benches—that there should be an International Criminal Court.

I am glad that the debate has allowed the instructive exchange between the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on the prerogative power. May I please sign up to their club? I wholly endorse what they said and wish only that I could pursue the matter in this place in future. It is entirely desirable that the House should be more involved in the process of making treaties, which have such a significant impact on our country, and there is, I hope, a growing consensus, but that remains to be seen.

The motion is entirely sensible. It allows reconsideration by all Members of the House of many matters, most of which have already been considered and, I believe, rather well debated at some length in Committee. The Committee was also programmed, and that was done with a degree of judgment as to what was required. The Minister was entirely reasonable in drawing attention to the scope of the debates that we had already had in Committee, and to the fact that very little was not considered in Committee that Members would have wished to consider.

My party has no objection of principle to the programming of debate. I was a member of the Hansard Society committee, which was chaired by the late Lord Rippon of Hexham, that deliberated on reform of the legislative process. I believe that programming allows a more complete and orderly discussion of issues, which safeguards the interests of Back Benchers, provided that programmes take full account of the nature of the discussions and of the variety of matters that it might be important to consider during the later stages of the Bill.

The only objection that I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have to programming is that, as it has been carried out during this Parliament, it has tended to be laid down too early in the legislative process, and not by the Standing Committee following the Second Reading debate, which would be the right time to make such determinations. I hope that the next Parliament will return to that issue, so that the concerns of the hon. Member for Islington, North and others about programming can be taken into account. If, for whatever reason, the Standing Committee cannot reach agreement, the matter might have to return to the Chamber to be determined, but I consider that this has been a reasonable start to the process of trying to order debate to ensure that all the major issues are addressed.

I fervently believe, as I said in Committee, that it is crucial that the Bill passes. The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) seems to give her support to the doctrine of unripe time. She seems to be saying that although in principle she favours the establishment of the court, it is not the right time for us to ratify the statute. Would she regard it as the right time for us to do so when 60 other countries have already set the processes in concrete, which would exclude us from participation in the choice of the judges operating in the court?

Mrs. Gillan: The right hon. Gentleman is putting in my mouth words that I never said—in fact, I have said the reverse. I have said that if the Minister is trying to justify the programme motion with the lame excuse that we need to be in the first 60 countries to ratify, it is worth remembering that only two countries have ratified this year, bringing us up to a total of 30, and that there is plenty of time, as far as I know, to be in the first 60 but to give this legislation proper scrutiny in the middle of a decent Parliament, when it is not being rushed through with undue haste.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Lady begs a great many questions in talking about the amount of time that is required. I do not know whether she has considered what is going on in the legislative and ratification processes of all the other countries. She might be right that it will take a little time for a sufficient number of members to ratify the treaty, but I would not wish to leave such a matter to chance, and it is very important that this country gives a lead. It is important not only for us to be among those countries that can influence the operation of the court, its structure, its rules of procedure and the like, but for us to give a lead to other countries that might, for unsuitable reasons, be delaying ratification of the treaty.

I commend the Government for their handling of the Bill. The Minister has been extremely sympathetic in his handling of interventions and amendments. He has shown not merely tolerance of arguments, including some that I have made at some length, but a genuine sympathy for the process of deliberation. It is a travesty of what happened in Committee to suggest that he and the Government have been unsuitably precipitate in their handling of the Bill. The reverse is the case, as will be clear to anyone who takes the trouble to read the record. I have no doubt that those NGOs that were spoken of with a certain disfavour by one Conservative Back Bencher earlier will at least read *Hansard*. They will know that there has been suitable deliberation, and that although the one issue on which uncertainty remains—universal jurisdiction—has had to be temporarily shelved, that shelving was not the result of any failure by the Government to provide enough time to debate it.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The right hon. Gentleman is being much too generous to the Government, given the timing of the presentation of the Bill to the House of Commons. In the first instance, the Bill was never expected to reach the stage that it has reached, because it would have been lost had there been a 3 May election. The fact that it has been timetabled now to complete proceedings before we dissolve means that the Government cannot accept amendments, however good the arguments adduced in their favour by the right hon. Gentleman and the rest of us in Committee or, indeed, now; otherwise, the Bill will not become law. That is why the timetable motion is a disgrace, and does dishonour to so important an issue.

Mr. Maclennan: It is uncharacteristic of the hon. Gentleman to indulge in such hyperbole. There has been a great deal of time to consider all the issues that were before the Committee, and many of them were considered in another place before they were raised by us in Committee. The Government have decided, in the last analysis, to stand, not on the issue of time, but on what they have decided is appropriate. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I do not agree with the Government on universal jurisdiction, but even on that issue it has not been lack of time that has caused the Government to end the discussions. They have done so because they believe that they are right, and, to be candid, they are entitled to do so; they have at this time a majority.

I hope that, in the limited time that is available to us to consider these matters, we shall not indulge in criticism of the procedures. It will be more interesting to revert, as soon as possible, to the issue of substance, while recognising that the paramount interest of this country in today's proceedings is implementation of the Bill, to enable us to give effect in our domestic law to the provisions that have already been agreed by our signature to the statute of Rome.

3.28 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I will not delay the House long, but it is important to place on the record from the Labour Back Benches, from someone who served on the Committee, my belief that we had an excellent debate in Committee and covered a wide range of areas.

[Mr. Mike Gapes]

It is somewhat duplicitous or hypocritical for the Opposition to advance arguments that imply that although they allegedly support the Bill, they are voting against the programme motion. It is not yet clear to me whether they will vote against Third Reading, but it was suggested in Committee by at least one Opposition Member that they would vote against the Bill if amendments were not agreed. Perhaps the modern Conservative party, in which the Back-Bench tail wags the dog, is in fact a kind of Leninist party—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The motion on the Order Paper is a programme motion.

Mr. Gapes: The Conservative party supports the Bill but opposes the programme motion, like a rope supporting a hanging man.

The Bill meets many of the aims that the Conservative party claimed that it wanted to achieve. We had extensive debate in Committee. The programme motion gives us the chance to get the legislation through the House today. If we cannot do so, the Bill will not receive Royal Assent before the election, and it will be lost.

Mrs. Gillan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gapes: No. The hon. Lady did not give way to me, so I see no reason why I should give way to her.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman is talking rubbish.

Mr. Gapes: The hon. Lady may think that, but perhaps she is referring to what is inside her head.

If the Bill falls, it will not be easy to reintroduce it quickly. It would again have to go through all its stages in both Houses of Parliament following the election on 7 June. Given the amount of time that the Opposition would no doubt want to discuss all the clauses and their amendments, we would have to spend several weeks more debating the same issues and making the same arguments as those we advanced extensively in Committee—whether it be the Conservative party's friendship with General Pinochet, the situation in Serbia or the problem of international jurisdiction.

We would not be able to complete all stages until the end of July, or even October or November. There would be no guarantee that this country would be one of the first 60 to pass such legislation. Therefore, we would not be one of the most influential countries in the International Criminal Court. For those reasons, we must vote for the programme motion and conclude business on the Bill today.

3.32 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The Government must be delighted to have such subservient minions as the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), who has just addressed the House with such conspicuous lack of articulate sense.

I oppose the programme motion not because I am against the concept of an international court; I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on the Front Bench. However, it is ludicrous to rush through a Bill that is supported in principle on both sides of the House. As there is a commitment to such legislation on both sides of the House, it matters not who forms the Government after the election—although it matters very much from other points of view. All we need is a commitment to putting the matter near the beginning of the Queen's Speech and to getting a Bill through the House. Any Member who is concerned with these issues—some of us have not had the benefit of serving on the Committee—must know that they are of great complexity and far-reaching importance and that it is crucial that we get the legislation right.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am sorry, but I do not have the time to do so.

In rushing the Bill through the House, there is a danger of our creating bad law. I want to say that, above all, that is symptomatic of the Government's steamroller approach, to which we have become increasingly accustomed during this Session of this very subservient Parliament, in which those in serried ranks behind the Government have supported whatever the Government have said and have been prepared to do whatever the Government have wanted them to do.

Mr. Bercow: Craven lickspittles.

Sir Patrick Cormack: As my hon. Friend says, with his normal self-effacing modesty, they are craven lickspittles—but far be it from me to use such appalling jargon.

The Government have been able to do whatever they have wanted because of their huge majority. The electorate ought to have regard to that, as should Labour Members. None of us knows the result of the election. Many think that they know, but no Member in this Chamber does know. There will be a time—*[Interruption.]* I wish that the Minister would stop behaving in such an unministerial manner, by sitting on the Front Bench making silly interventions.

Mr. Gapes *rose—*

Sir Patrick Cormack: I need no lessons from the hon. Gentleman.

Sooner or later—it could well be 8 June—Labour Members will find themselves on the Opposition Benches, and will not want legislation to be steamrollered through as it has been—

It being forty-five minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [7 November 2000].*

Question put:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The House having divided: Ayes 238, Noes 90.

Division No. 208] **[3.36 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Lammy, David
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Mike Hall.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David

Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
  Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Peter Atkinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

International Criminal Court Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Committee, considered.

New Clause 2

AMENDMENTS OF THE ICC STATUTE

'If an amendment is adopted to the ICC Statute under Article 121, within six months of the meeting of the Assembly of States Parties which adopts such amendment Her Majesty's Government shall obtain approval for such amendment by positive resolution of both Houses of Parliament, failing such approval being given six months after the meeting of the Assembly of States Parties Her Majesty's Government will give notice for withdrawal under Article 127.'.—*[Mr. Blunt.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.53 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

It is a pleasure to speak to new clause 2. We discussed it in Committee, but I chose to withdraw it so that we could return to it on Report. It deals with immensely important principles, to which we referred in the debate on the programme motion, despite Madam Deputy Speaker's energetic efforts to stop us. We are especially concerned about the ability of Parliament to oversee the Executive and the way in which it can—or cannot—control the royal prerogative power of treaty making. An interesting alliance was formed in the earlier debate between the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) and the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), all of whom identified the need to implement the principle that is at the heart of the new clause, which would give more power to Parliament to oversee the Executive.

The new clause also goes to the heart of the Rome statute and the problems that are inherent in it, which the Opposition tried to correct in Committee.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The hon. Gentleman knows my opinions on the royal prerogative. Will he make it clear that the purpose of the new clause is to strengthen the Bill, not to impede it? He appears to be saying that if any change is made to the ICC statute, that should be discussed by us. Is that over and above what is in the Bill, or is he making a genuine attempt to ensure parliamentary accountability?

Mr. Blunt: I am happy to allay the hon. Gentleman's concerns. This is a genuine attempt to increase the accountability of the Executive. It is possible to make substantial changes to the statute after we have concluded our proceedings and, unless we accept the new clause, we will have no means of bringing the Executive to account.

The hon. Gentleman will notice that the new clause refers specifically to article 121, which is the mechanism in the Rome statute by which amendments can be made. I have tabled it because I am concerned about the fault lines in the statute, which the article identifies. We have signed up to the statute, and it is possible that France will do the same. However, Her Majesty's Government have negotiated our proceedings in such a way that it is difficult to believe that other major countries, such as China, Russia, India and the United States of America, will also sign up. That is because the statute grants power on a nation-by-nation basis. There is no recognition of the contribution that each nation makes to world security or of the balance of influence in the world.

The statute sets out the majority that is needed for it to be amended. Fundamental amendments to the list of crimes will require a seven eighths majority of the states party to the statute to agree. Hon. Members should bear in mind the fact that even if the statute is amended fundamentally by changing articles 5, 6, 7 and 8, seven eighths of the countries representing 1.1 billion people could outvote the countries representing 3.8 billion people, if China and India accede. Governments who represent more than three quarters of the world's population could be outvoted on the most fundamental changes.

In Committee, the Solicitor-General made it clear that if changes arise from a seven eighths majority under article 121, they would have to be implemented in primary legislation because they would change the nature of what constitutes a crime in English law. I acknowledge that. However, he was not clear about changes to the way in which the court will be administered, which could be fundamental to its procedures and how it pursues those people whom it identifies as criminals.

We spent much time in Committee discussing the possibility of the ICC trying to bring British citizens to justice when the United Kingdom has decided that they have no case to answer. That could happen. I am sure that the hon. Member for Islington, North would say that that is appropriate because that is what the ICC is for. If individual nations seek to defend citizens in the event that they have committed a crime as decided by the ICC, those people should be brought to justice. If we in the United Kingdom decided that there was no case to bring against a British subject but there was still a warrant for their arrest and a desire to bring them to trial at the ICC, there would be a crisis between the UK and the ICC.

4 pm

The way in which the court will operate, how individuals are elected to various positions and how the pre-trial chamber will work are matters that are contained in the detail of the statute, which can be amended by a two-thirds majority of the states parties. A collection of small countries representing a small fraction of the world's population could outvote the larger countries and a substantial majority of the world's population. In those terms, the figures become even more dramatic.

The interests of the large states have not been represented or protected in the statute, and a mechanism should have been found to enable that to happen. That is why, sadly, the large states are unlikely to ratify the treaty. In the end, that will be calamitous to the prospect of the ICC becoming the successful institution that I believe right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House want it to be.

The purpose of the new clause is to enable Parliament to have the opportunity, every time an amendment is agreed to the ICC statute under article 121, to consider it within six months. The Government would have to obtain the positive approval of both Houses. That is not a substantial parliamentary burden to place upon the Executive. A simple motion would have to be passed in each place. The clause does not provide that the procedure should be by way of positive resolution. It would impose a limited burden on the Executive in terms of parliamentary time.

Given that changes to the statute could be fundamental to the way in which the ICC works, the clause should commend itself to the House. The principle behind it appears to have the commendation of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House. We heard from the hon. Member for Islington, North when we were debating the programme motion. In Committee, the Solicitor-General chose not to oppose my point in principle. He said:

> "There is still a possibility for Parliament to examine other changes and express its views."

That adduces the Ponsonby report.

The hon. and learned Gentleman added:

> "Perhaps parliamentary procedure rules need to be changed; that is a matter to which we are alive and are happy to consider, but in a different context."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 3 May 2001; c. 276.]

As the position in principle has been conceded by implication by the Solicitor-General in Committee, and given the view that has been expressed across the philosophical divide in the House about the necessity for Parliament to take greater power over the Executive's exercise of royal prerogative powers in this respect, the clause should commend itself to the House, and I hope that it will.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I support the new clause because it allows us to consider the huge constitutional implications that lie behind the Government's prerogative powers, which they hold in trust for the sovereign, in the making of treaties.

In Committee, I complained on several occasions—no doubt to the great inconvenience and boredom of other members—that we could amend the Bill, subject to the arithmetic of Committee membership, but we could gain no purchase on the statute of Rome. All three parties represented in Committee agreed that the ICC was an aim worthy of achievement. However, we did not agree with the detail of the statute of Rome—the treaty that we were signing up to—in every respect. We had fundamental concerns, not least about the protection of our armed forces and our military and political commanders if the statute of Rome were to be ratified.

The clause highlights the absence of connection between the Chamber and the Government, which is the sovereign. As I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) when we were debating the programme motion, by means of the statute of Rome we are handing over powers to an extra-territorial body. We are not handing the powers of our citizens, which we hold in trust for them, to an extra-governmental body such as the United Nations or the European Union. They are being handed to a court. Once the court is set up after ratification by 60 states, Parliament will have little influence over it, except in the most indirect way.

I applaud my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) for reintroducing the debate at the 59th minute of the 11th hour of this Parliament. I am not necessarily wedded to the exact detail of his scheme, but that does not matter. Other schemes have been suggested.

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

In the other place in the early part of the year, Lord Lester of Herne Hill mentioned referring treaties to Select Committees of the other place. He talked about the Ponsonby rule and about the Conservative Administration publishing impact statements for the consideration of Parliament on the effect of treaties upon the UK. However, none of the schemes that we have so far discussed allows in any real way for the elected Members of this place to have any control over how the sovereign power of exercising the prerogative is dealt with by the Government.

For once, I do not attack the motives of Ministers. They have plenty to be embarrassed about, but their motives in wanting the ICC to come into existence are of the finest. However, they appear to forget the constitutional issues that underlie the making of treaties, and the handing over of Parliament's powers and government to extra-territorial bodies, which must necessarily follow, is something that we ignore at our peril.

I may be wrong, but I suspect that until those matters came to be discussed in Committee, many Labour Members who served in Committee, and certainly many Members who were not on it, had no idea that they had no purchase on the treaty.

Mr. Desmond Browne (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I did.

Mr. Garnier: Of course, the hon. Gentleman knows everything. He showed us that in Committee. I am grateful for his attendance and his contributions. He adorned our debates in every sense, but he was unusual. There are many Members—this is not a party political point—who are not aware of the constitutional arrangements and are happy to troop sheep-like through the Lobby at the behest of the Government Whips, little realising that they will be handing over to extra-territorial bodies huge powers that they will never be able to recover.

We are sent here by the electorate to represent their interests. I suspect that they do not send us here—I know that this is the position in my case—to give the Government huge powers to hand over our responsibilities to extra-territorial bodies. That simple point is often missed and I am hugely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate for providing an opportunity to debate it.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) for returning to the matter on the Floor of the House, not because I would like his new clause to be accepted or the progress of the Bill impeded in any way, but because parliamentary deliberation on treaties is an important constitutional issue that deserves wider and more extensive scrutiny in the post-election period.

Apropos of the new clause, I recall an incident in the development of our constitutional processes in Scotland. A certain lady became a lady licentiate of St. Andrews university. She was one of its first female graduates and, as such, she claimed the right to enjoy the franchise to vote for the university Member of Parliament. Had she been conceded that right, she would have been the first woman in the United Kingdom to have access to the vote. However, when the matter came before the court, her claim was overruled and the judge said that the constitution of our country could not be changed by a side wind.

As we were not able to extend the franchise to ladies through that adventurous episode in the Scottish courts, I suspect that it would be unlikely that we will be able to change the constitution on treaty making by assenting to the new clause—*[Interruption.]* That is not to impugn the motives of the hon. Member for Reigate or undermine the constitutional fact that Parliament can do what it likes with respect to legislation. None the less, on an issue of such importance, it would be more sensible to have a little time to deliberate on the implementation of the underlying principle of parliamentary involvement in treaty making, and review alternative ways of doing that. It is not necessarily the fact that we want to give Parliament the automatic power to dispense with a treaty obligation in defiance of the wishes of the Government of the day.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): The right hon. Gentleman made a valid point about wider constitutional questions and asked for a little time to consider them. I remind him and the House that, under the terms of the statute of Rome, there is all the time in the world. It prescribes that there shall be no amendments until seven years after it comes into force, and it is unlikely to do so for another year. In other words, we have eight years before we are faced with the first amendment, which is two full Parliaments—a long enough time, I should have thought, to have a leisurely debate on the constitutional principle that we are discussing.

Mr. Maclennan: I am obliged to the Foreign Secretary and delighted that he feels that degree of urgency about effecting change in the processes of which he has given notice; I hope that what he implies is justified.

Mr. Garnier: What the Foreign Secretary said is true, as it appears in article 121 of the treaty of Rome. However, the serious point is that, in that eight-year period, the House can do nothing about the matter. My complaint is that the House of Commons has no influence whatever on the making or suggestion of any amendments to the treaty.

Mr. Maclennan: If I understood the Foreign Secretary correctly, he was making the point that, under the statute, the process for making amendments cannot become operative within seven years. That is certainly long enough to make changes to our domestic procedures to allow effective scrutiny and involvement of the House of Commons and, perhaps, of another place, in the processes of treaty making. I put it no more strongly than that; I am not entirely certain about the matter and would like to have a genuine national debate about whether we want to take away from the Executive the last word in such a matter. However, it is useful to debate the subject, and I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Reigate has tabled the new clause.

4.15 pm

Mr. Corbyn: I shall be brief, as an awful lot of amendments have been tabled; I hope that there will be time to debate them this afternoon.

I have my doubts about the new clause, but I do not doubt the motive of the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) in tabling it. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, there cannot be any amendments until seven years after, I assume, the first 60 ratifications, which will make the treaty operational. As he said, there will probably be eight years until anything can happen, so there will be plenty of opportunities in the House during that period to consider any mechanism for reporting and reviewing the way in which amendments should operate.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) that the way in which the royal prerogative operates in treaty making is important. A central deficit of British constitutional arrangements is the fact that the Executive have always had much more power in international affairs than Parliament. We can legislate and vote only on consequential matters or have a vote of confidence in the Government, which are fairly blunt instruments for dealing with international affairs. There is no mechanism for dealing in a detailed way with the Executive's treaty making. A new Parliament will provide a good opportunity to review that.

When the Minister replies, will he comment on the reporting of what British representatives do in international organisations? There are many international forums, such as the United Nations and various UN and UN-related bodies, including the International Labour Organisation, the Human Rights Commission and many others, in which British representatives participate in debates and resolutions and agree decisions. At the end of the day, those things are fairly open, but there is no proper mechanism for reporting to the House—other than on the most dramatic events—what British representatives do. Any review ought to say that there should be a method of parliamentary scrutiny and, possibly, parliamentary involvement in such matters. It is all a question of how accountable we make the Executive in international matters.

When the Bill is enacted, we will cede quite a lot to an international court. Frankly, I wish that we were ceding more because there are weaknesses in the Bill, which I have tried to address in a couple of amendments. Generally speaking, we are establishing the principle of an international body to deal with criminals, or potential criminals, in a way that has not been possible so far unless, as I mentioned earlier, a special process was established, such as that for dealing with the situation in Germany, Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia. There is a case for setting up such a body, and I hope that we agree to it. However, I suspect that, in his new clause, the hon. Member for Reigate is confusing two different things. He is saying that there should be more scrutiny—I agree with that—but he is also saying that matters should come back to Parliament if there is going to be any change in statute. There will be no change in the statute for the first seven years of the treaty becoming operational, so there will be plenty of opportunity to deal with that issue anyway.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. John Battle): It is perfectly proper for us to discuss the principles and practice of parliamentary deliberation on treaties on the Floor of the House. That is a good and important debate, as the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said frequently in Committee. This afternoon, there has been consensus that we should address that theme. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) has participated actively in discussion of the Bill to the last moments of his time as a Member of Parliament, and leaves a large challenge to the House to address those matters in a timely way in future.

I want to argue that it may not be proper to use the Bill to change our procedures for scrutinising treaties in the House; the Bill is not an appropriate vehicle for that. The process of scrutiny is a significant question that comes within the ambit of discussion of the Bill. However, the Bill's aim and purpose is to allow us to ratify the statute of Rome and sign up to the International Criminal Court. The new clause is unnecessary, not simply because of the question of time, of which we are well aware, but because amendments to the statue will come before Parliament in the normal course of events. They will come before Parliament in two ways: there will be amendments that require implementation in domestic law, as the statute itself does—for example, on new crimes—or there will be technical changes that do not require primary legislation, but which will still be considered by Parliament before the Government accept them.

The Committee agreed that we should not use the Bill to introduce back-door legislation, and that the Bill should not be a vehicle for redefining criminal law or our criminal court procedure. It would therefore be inappropriate for the new clause to be written into the Bill to shift us in that direction.

Amendments to the statute already fall within the scope of parliamentary procedures for scrutiny, including the Ponsonby rule whereby they must lie before Parliament for 21 days before acceptance. Parliament would have time to debate any issues arising. All treaties and amendments not requiring legislative changes are subject to ministerial accountability to Parliament in exactly the same way as other areas of policy. It is not as though there is no scrutiny; the question is whether there is appropriate scrutiny. That is the larger question. I gave evidence to the Procedure Committee on this subject on 13 July 2000. On that occasion I emphasised that the Government remain open to considering ways of contributing to efficient and effective scrutiny of treaties.

The new clause refers to article 121 of the statute, which provides for changes to the statute only when they are accepted by seven eighths of state parties. That is a high threshold, in addition to the time constraint and the fact that there would be no amendments for seven years. In the light of the discussion, which can be continued more appropriately elsewhere in the House, I ask the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) to withdraw his new clause.

Mr. Blunt: I listened to the Minister, who finished by referring to the threshold of seven eighths. I might point out to him that the threshold is one quarter of the world's population, as represented by its states, so the threshold is not quite as high as he implies.

[Mr. Blunt]

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) for explaining the origin of the expression "side wind", which featured in our discussion in Committee. He pointed out, when I muttered at him from a sedentary position, that the court cannot change our constitution, but of course Parliament can. If we chose to do so, there is no reason why we could not change the Bill.

The Foreign Secretary said that we had plenty of time—eight years. I got the impression that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) agreed with him in that respect. We may have eight years in which to come to grips with the matter, but I would not mind making a small wager with both the Foreign Secretary and the hon. Member for Islington, North that in eight years, when amendments under articles 121 and 122 take effect, we will not be very much further forward in the way in which Parliament examines treaties.

I have listened to the Minister's arguments. I hope that the discussion of the new clause has triggered a wider debate on the issue, and I hope that when we have a Conservative Foreign Secretary and Minister in a few weeks, they will contribute to a discussion about how Parliament will oversee the Executive with respect to treaties. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 3

JURISDICTION OF THE COURT

'. This Act shall have effect, subject to the making of a declaration by Her Majesty's Government in accordance with Article 124 of the ICC Statute, with the proviso that for a period of seven years after the entry into force of the Statute the United Kingdom does not accept the jurisdiction of the Court with respect to the category of crimes referred to in Article 8 when such crimes are alleged to have been committed by United Kingdom nationals or on United Kingdom territory.'.—*[Mr. Maude.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss New clause 7—*Ratification: reservations and declarations*—

'The Secretary of State shall not ratify the ICC Statute unless

(a) a report is laid before Parliament, setting out

(i) any reservations Her Majesty's Government proposes to make and the reason for those reservations,

(ii) any declarations Her Majesty's Government proposes to make and the reason for such declarations, and

(iii) that report is approved by each House of Parliament.'.

Mr. Maude: New clause 3 would delay implementation of the Act until the Government exercise the seven-year opt-out which is provided for in article 124 of the Rome statute. This important matter was discussed in Committee. Throughout the deliberations on the Bill, both in the House and in the other place, the Government have singularly failed to answer adequately the Opposition's concerns.

We have said many times, and my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) said two years ago in response to the Foreign Secretary's original statement on the matter, that we support the principle of setting up the International Criminal Court. Nothing that we say in any way resiles from that. However, there are genuine concerns about the way in which the Bill will be implemented. Its implications must be properly probed and examined. As we said on Second Reading, we expect some changes to the Bill if it is to have our support.

The seven-year opt-out, which has already been exercised by the French Government, is a means of giving time to see how the court progresses. At the same time, it ensures that members of the armed forces are exempt from the jurisdiction of the Court for the offence of war crimes. Any number of soothing words have issued from the mouths of Ministers to allay the concerns that have been expressed, but none have been convincing. That is why we urge the House to adopt the new clause.

Our principal concern is the danger to members of the armed forces and the implications for the way they would have to operate—the constraints under which they would feel compelled to operate in circumstances which, as we all know, are already extraordinarily difficult. The Government have not given a satisfactory reason why they will not seek such a seven-year opt-out in the same way as France has. They have not said why they prefer other countries not to do so, or why France is fundamentally different from Britain and why, in their view, members of the British armed services should be subject to a lesser degree of protection than members of the French armed services.

New clause 7 relates to the declarations that we hope the Government will make on the statute of Rome and the reason for those declarations. It would mean that the Rome statute would not be ratified unless a report were laid before the House setting out those declarations and the reasons for them, any exceptions that the Government proposed to make and the reasons for them, and the approval of each House of Parliament was secured for such a report.

With the continuing uncertainty in respect of the protection of the armed forces, it is particularly important that Parliament should know what declarations will be made. As we have made clear, France has made such declarations, which seek to protect its armed forces; so has Israel. There is no question of those two Governments being opposed to the court in principle. As one of my hon. Friends said on Second Reading, Israel has been a long-time proponent of the idea of an international criminal court. If such states as Israel and France have such concerns, it is incumbent on the Government to tell us how they will protect our armed forces.

The concerns that have been expressed on a number of occasions have not been met. Those concerns began to emerge in reports to the newspapers some time before the Bill was introduced in this House, but after it had been introduced in the other place and proceedings there were under way. The reports, which looked like unattributable briefing from senior members of the armed forces, were raised in Committee in the other place. The Minister dealing with the Bill in the House of Lords said that there was nothing to worry about, that no representations had been made and that everyone in the armed services, including all the senior officers, were completely happy about the matter. It turned out that that was not the case.

4.30 pm

I return to the points that we made on Second Reading and subsequently in Committee. Our concerns arose during the deliberations of the Select Committee that was established to consider not the Bill before us, but the Armed Forces Bill. The Committee took evidence from the new Chief of the Defence Staff, who was also asked about this Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) said:

> "Let me ask you about another piece of prospective legislation, because it is very important for this House to get the best military advice before we legislate. Do you have any concerns about the potential impact of our ratification of the treaty setting up the International Criminal Court on military morale or operational effectiveness?"

I would add in parenthesis that the point about operational effectiveness is intensely important. The Chief of the Defence Staff gave a significant answer on which we should reflect carefully before we allow the Bill to proceed to its final stages:

> "I do know a bit about this Bill, and I think that we need to be very careful indeed that when the Bill is taken through Parliament, we do not put ourselves in a situation where a junior person carrying out orders which he believes to be entirely proper can subsequently find himself in front of the International Criminal Court. So far, I have been told that this is unlikely to happen, because the national court would have the opportunity to investigate the case if it were pointed in that direction by the ICC."

My hon. Friend went on to ask the Chief of the Defence Staff the following question:

> "Is it good enough to hear that it is 'unlikely to happen', or would you prefer to have a more concrete exemption or derogation or protection in law?"

In response, Admiral—

Mr. Garnier: Admirable.

Mr. Maude: As my hon. and learned Friend says, he is also admirable. Admiral Boyce replied:

> "I cannot say that 'unlikely' fills me with huge confidence. I would be much happier with a completely unequivocal statement, but I guess that is probably the best I will get."

Clearly, the new Chief of the Defence Staff has got the measure of this Government pretty quickly, if he realises that an equivocal statement is the best that he is likely to get.

The men and women in the armed services, who come under the leadership of the Chief of the Defence staff—and the political leadership of Ministers in Her Majesty's Government—are entitled to something better than an equivocal statement. They are entitled to some real reassurance. When we probed the matter on Second Reading, the Foreign Secretary did his best to be reassuring, but I regret to say that he failed to allay our concerns. He could say only that it would not happen in practice. He would not say that members of the armed forces could not in practice find themselves pursued by the International Criminal Court, perhaps on the basis of a political vendetta by other countries that have grudges to settle. He could not say that it was impossible for that to happen.

I asked the Foreign Secretary why he could not accept the sort of proposals that we were putting forward if he was as confident as he was encouraging us to be and knew that our concerns were unrealistic. We seek only to provide the protection in absolutely concrete terms, in statutory form. That could be achieved not only through the opt-out provision, which would enable us to see how the International Criminal Court works in its important stages, but also by the introduction of subsequent amendments that we have tabled in relation to enabling the Secretary of State to exercise discretion. All those proposals would provide reassurance and protection for members of the armed services. I consider it a matter of regret that the Foreign Secretary and the Government have been unwilling to show any flexibility whatever on the matter.

Mr. Robin Cook: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the statement that it would not happen in practice was not mine. I quoted the words to correct him, as he had quoted Geoffrey Robertson QC as saying that there was a theoretical possibility. I reminded him that it was my hon. Friend who went on to say that it would not happen in practice. In my speech, I said that British service personnel would never be prosecuted, as we could pursue any bona fide allegation ourselves. There is no prospect of the sort of mischievous prosecution by a malign state to which he referred, because of the pre-trial procedure. I remind him of the words of the Opposition spokesperson in the House of Lords, Lord Kingsland, who said:

> "It is . . . a great achievement to have put in place a pre-trial inquiry to wash out of the system any bogus allegations."

It is time that the Opposition gave up arousing—in their own way, mischievous—fears about an outcome that will never happen.

Mr. Maude: Two points arise from those comments. First, it is extremely patronising of the Foreign Secretary to speak in that way about the concerns expressed by the Chief of the Defence Staff—*[Interruption.]* He says that we are raising unjustified fears, but we did not speak to the Chief of the Defence Staff, who came to his own conclusions about his concerns about the armed forces, for which he has to provide the military leadership. If the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that the Chief of the Defence Staff is so weak and vulnerable that he will be taken in by scurrilous remarks made by the Opposition, he should bear it in mind that he is referring to a serious leader who must make his own judgments. The judgment that the Chief of the Defence Staff has made is that he is not satisfied with what the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues are saying. That is what he said when he was asked about the matter in the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the Chief of the Defence Staff said no such thing: neither could he possibly have said anything other than what I said on Second Reading, because the remarks with which the right hon. Gentleman is regaling the House at length—I think that he is doing so for the second time—were made before Second Reading and before I gave an unequivocal assurance.

Mr. Maude: I made it clear at the outset that the exchange from which I have quoted extensively occurred

[Mr. Maude]

while the Bill was being considered in the other place. The concerns began to arise while the Bill was emerging from the other place and was in transit to this House. We were then able to raise the matter when the Bill was considered on Second Reading. It is remarkable that the reassurance that the Chief of Defence Staff needs has been provided by comments made by the Foreign Secretary in the Chamber. We were told that no concerns at all were expressed by senior members of the military or of the naval staff, but it turned out that that was not the case. At the time when the assurances were first made by Baroness Scotland in the other place, the Chief of the Defence Staff had already expressed the concerns in a House of Commons Select Committee, but the proceedings had not been reported at that stage.

My second point in response to the Foreign Secretary is that it is precisely allegations that are not well founded or based on bona fide cases about which we are concerned. Of course, we hope that a proper system of pre-trial review will weed out vexatious claims, but he cannot say with absolute confidence that it is impossible that any member of the British armed forces will ever find himself subject to the international jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court because the case will have been dealt with in international courts.

Mr. Battle: He will be charged by the national courts first.

Mr. Maude: I am not concerned about genuine cases, and I fully accept the Minister of State's remarks in that respect. Of course, the person would be charged by the national courts first in all such cases, but I am anxious about cases in which the national prosecuting authorities—whether military or civil—have already investigated a case and decided that no proper proceedings can be brought, but in which politically motivated proceedings—

Mr. Robin Cook *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Maude: The Foreign Secretary shakes his head and says that everything is fine, but it is not because that is not the end of the matter. It remains possible. Of course, if the matter has been adjudicated in the national courts, that is the end of it, but if the authorities have considered it and decided not to proceed in the national courts, it is still open to the ICC, as I understand it, to bring proceedings.

If the Foreign Secretary is so confident that it is completely impossible for those circumstances to arise, let him accept our amendments. They provide for a discretion to be exercised so that there is a watertight cut-out which enables Ministers who are confident that a case is completely vexatious to ensure that such a warrant is not executed against a member of the British armed forces. If he is so confident that the current system allows for that, let him provide for it in the Bill. Members of the armed forces are likely to place a great deal more reliance on something that is definitively enacted in statute than on his assurances.

Mr. Browne: Can the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House how his proposed new clause would achieve the level of reassurance for our armed forces that he seeks to give them? I do not support it. Any reservation made in terms of article 124 would relate only to crimes under article 8. Our soldiers will still be subject to the jurisdiction of the court under articles 5 and 6. There is no mechanism for reserving our position in relation to the jurisdiction there. The Foreign Secretary cannot therefore use any word other than "unlikely" himself when he gives the reassurance, even if the amendment is passed.

Mr. Maude: The main reason for new clause 3, which would provide for the seven-year opt-out, is that we think that it the best way of providing protection—

Mr. Browne: It is not watertight.

Mr. Maude: It is watertight in terms of protection for our armed forces. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman mutters from a sedentary position—

Mr. Browne: I will clarify the intervention. The ICC will still exercise jurisdiction over our nationals or in respect of crimes committed on our territory in relation to articles 6 and 7. There may be allegations that such crimes have been committed by members of our armed forces. Any reservations under article 124 will not refer to them, so we will still have to rely on the bona fides of the prosecution and the court to give our armed forces the protection that they need. It is better that we are in there, ensuring that that happens from the outset, than that we have half a solution.

Mr. Maude: The Government of France sought protection because they are as concerned as we are about the jeopardy in which their armed forces may be placed by the treaty as it stands. Their declaration under the treaty is:

> "The French Republic declares that it does not accept the jurisdiction of the court with respect to the category of crimes referred to in article 8 when a crime is alleged to have been committed by its nationals or on its territory."

They may have used a completely worthless form of words, but clearly the French Government concluded that a declaration along those lines would give their armed forces the protection that they require. It is odd that the British Government should be so relaxed about this that they are not concerned to give British armed forces the same protection.

4.45 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): If the right hon. Gentleman is seeking to get immunity for British military personnel and, to follow that logic, every other signatory to the treaty of Rome in a similar position, would it not be the case that the ICC could not prosecute military personnel per se? Indeed, none of the crimes listed under article 8 could be brought to prosecution by the ICC.

Mr. Maude: The Foreign Secretary is trying to assure the House that there is no question of British armed service men ever being subject to the ICC in any event. All I am trying to do is to give legal effect through the statute to the Foreign Secretary's solemn declarations made in this House. If he is prepared to be so definitive about it here, why is he not prepared to provide an equally definitive protection to the armed forces in the statute?

Mr. Corbyn: Can the right hon. Gentleman make absolutely clear whether his position is that the armed forces in general should be exempt from provisions in this statute?

Mr. Maude: I believe that the British armed forces should be exempt.

Mr. Corbyn: Why?

Mr. Maude: In the absence of genuine immunity, the armed forces will find their military efficiency, morale and ability to be operationally effective seriously inhibited. There will always be the anxiety that they will be second-guessed subsequently by those who are not in a military environment and do not understand the pressures under which they have been working. Those are precisely the concerns expressed by a number of senior military officers. In the heat of battle with battlefield decisions to be made, officers try to the best of their ability to interpret and give effect to the rules of engagement under which they are operating. Just the thought of any risk of subsequent second-guessing may inhibit, and affect adversely, their military effectiveness. The result of damaging military effectiveness is lives put in danger. We think that that matters.

Mr. Robin Cook: Since the right hon. Gentleman appears to be labouring under a misunderstanding, may I assure him that there is nothing in the Bill that creates an offence that does not already exist in international law and to which British service personnel are not already liable and committed? It is fully reflected in their training. There is no evidence that that has reduced their operational capability. May I remind him that he was part of a Government who set up the International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia?

Mr. Maude: I was not.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman says that he was not, but we can take it that he was at least complicit, by his membership card, in the actions of that Government. They set up the war crimes tribunal in the full knowledge that there were many thousands of British personnel in the former Yugoslavia. They, rightly, made no exemption for British personnel. Can he cite a single case where the operational effectiveness of British personnel in the former Yugoslavia was impeded by the existence of that tribunal?

Mr. Maude: As I have said on several occasions, if the Opposition had random, fanciful anxieties, the Foreign Secretary would be entitled to dismiss them airily and carry on regardless. However, those anxieties are not simply ours; the most senior member of the British armed forces, the Chief of the Defence Staff, said that he was genuinely worried that the Bill as it is currently drafted would impede military effectiveness.

Perhaps the Foreign Secretary wishes to ride roughshod over such anxieties, but they are genuine. One does not need to be absolutely sure that a risk will be realised: the possibility should be enough to make a responsible Government and Parliament think twice before enacting such a Bill. We have steadily proposed changes as the Bill has progressed. We cannot support the measure unless some serious changes are made.

Mr. Corbyn: In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), the right hon. Gentleman suggested that the Conservative party believes that the British armed forces should not be covered by the Bill. How would he respond if, for example, the Indonesian Government said that they were happy to sign up to the statute that establishes the International Criminal Court, but that it should not cover the Indonesian armed forces? That would be nonsensical. If we believe in international jurisdiction, it should cover everybody on everything.

Mr. Maude: I am a Member of this Parliament. We have a specific responsibility for members of the British armed forces. We ask them to risk their lives, sometimes in horrific circumstances, fighting for their country. We are the Parliament of that country, and it is therefore our task to voice genuine anxieties about our armed forces' safety, and their ability to operate effectively and discharge the heavy burdens that we place upon them from time to time. I am obliged to express those anxieties, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not feel able to pick them up.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Maude: There are other groups of amendments and we are subject to a stringent programme motion of three hours. I therefore wish to proceed with my speech.

Although the treaty was negotiated some time ago, the Bill was introduced extremely late. It is now being bounced through on a strict guillotine so that the Foreign Secretary can try to add a little lustre to his chipped and damaged ethical foreign policy.

The Foreign Secretary is trying to force through a Bill that genuinely places in jeopardy the military effectiveness of the British armed forces, so that he can continue his grandstanding and try to repair his discredited ethical foreign policy. The House should not accept that, and I therefore ask hon. Members to support the new clause.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I shall be brief. I wanted to intervene in the speech of the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), but that was not possible. I shall therefore say a few words about the new clause.

The proposal represents a classic Conservative party position: the opt-out. The new clause refers to seven years; it does not state: "for the duration of the next Parliament". Perhaps it means, "for the duration of two Parliaments". However, the right hon. Gentleman has let the cat out of the bag; the new clause represents not an opt-out for seven years, but opposition to the principle of subjecting the British Army to the Bill. That reflects the Conservative party position on the euro. The Opposition claim that they are doing something for a limited period, but only because they know that some of their colleagues would disagree if they stated that an opt-out was

[Mr. Mike Gapes]

indefinite. They therefore adopt a compromise position of claiming that their proposal would operate for a limited period—seven years in the case that we are considering. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to give way to the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) if he wants to clarify matters.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman asks why the new clause specifies seven years. The answer is simple: the statute of Rome provides for that.

Mr. Gapes: The period could be longer. The new clause could state, "seven years or more".

Mr. Maude: The statute of Rome provides for seven years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gapes: I am happy to give way again if the right hon. Gentleman wishes to respond. He does not wish to do that.

I shall draw attention to another matter. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In view of the limited time that is available, I suggest that the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) carry on with his speech.

Mr. Gapes: As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said, if we accept the new clauses, the British forces would be sending a very interesting message to other countries. If it is good enough for the International Criminal Court to be empowered to act against the armed forces of countries that perhaps do not maintain the scrupulous standards and have the generally exemplary record of our own armed forces, why is it not good enough for those provisions to apply to the British Army when it is serving with the United Nations in Bosnia, doing such an excellent job in Kosovo or protecting human rights and defending democracy in Sierra Leone?

Why should not the sanctions of the International Criminal Court apply to our armed forces, who are not accused of committing war crimes, massacres or human rights abuses—all of which are accusations that have been made against the armed forces of other countries that will be ratifying the International Criminal Court statute?

New clause 3 is a Conservative wrecking amendment. It is designed to wreck the Bill. We had it from the mouth of the right hon. Member for Horsham that Conservative Members' real position is to vote against, or at least not to support this International Criminal Court legislation. The public, the abused non-governmental organisations, and everyone in Churches, pressure groups, campaigns and schools can draw their own conclusions about Conservative Members' attitude to human rights, democracy and international law.

Mr. Maclennan: I had not intended to speak in this debate, but I very much disliked the implication of the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) that the Conservative party is the only party in the House that is concerned about the position of our armed services, and that in supporting the Bill we are in some way in dereliction of our obligation. That is a total defiance of sense and is at odds with the Bill's underlying purposes, one of which is the protection of our own troops from the violation of the laws of war by the creation of an effective system that eventually will be capable of bringing to justice those who deny that system.

In this century, our troops have been the victims of the defiance of the laws of war not in their tens or hundreds, but in their hundreds of thousands. In the first world war, how many of our people were gassed in defiance of the laws of war? How ineffective have we been in erecting a system of international justice to bring the perpetrators of such atrocities to justice? The reality is that this legislation is a very small step in effectively implementing what the Foreign Secretary has rightly described as existing international public law in relation to the laws of war.

The distortion and inflation of Admiral Sir Michael Boyce's comments—

Mr. Maude *rose—*

Mr. Maclennan: I shall not give way to the right hon. Gentleman in the middle of a sentence. I would like to finish making the point before he replies to it.

Admiral Sir Michael Boyce was giving evidence on an entirely different matter when he made an incidental remark. I have no reason to believe that anything that he said expressed the view that the Bill should not be given effect. He certainly did not say so in terms.

Mr. Maude *rose—*

Mr. Maclennan: Nor did he express the view that the statute of Rome was against the interests of our troops.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot have two right hon. Gentlemen on their feet at the same time. I think that I can ask the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) to wait until the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross has signified that he is giving way.

Mr. Maclennan: I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall now happily give way.

Mr. Maude: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He accused me of having distorted the comments of the Chief of the Defence Staff, but I quoted the Chief of the Defence Staff absolutely verbatim. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that someone who occupies such a position is prone to making casual, off-the-cuff remarks about a matter of such gravity, he has a much lower opinion of him than I do.

Mr. Maclennan: I most certainly did not suggest that, because we have heard those words and read them on a number of occasions. They have been repeated ad nauseam on the Floor of the House and in Committee, but they do not sustain the weight or the interpretation that has been attached to them. That is the point that I wanted to make. The Conservative spokesman is ignoring the whole purpose and point of the Bill and that should not go unchallenged. It is very much in the interests of our armed services that the rule of international law and the extension of the effectiveness of sanctions against abuses of the law are properly in place and that we can bring to justice the perpetrators of the crimes from which our armed forces have suffered over the past century and before. I commend the Government's efforts in doing so.

5 pm

Mr. Browne: I rise to oppose the amendments, if not in the same style, at least with the same quality of indignation that was expressed by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan). The suggestion that the only hon. Members who can speak effectively on behalf of the safety and security of our armed forces are the few Conservative Members who have spoken today is an untruth that has to be put in its place. Looking at the amendments and the intellectual discipline that lies behind them, I suspect that they are nothing more than a lame excuse for an opportunity to vote against the Bill.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): What is wrong with that?

Mr. Browne: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman what is wrong with that. The amendments are a lame excuse for an opportunity to vote against the legislation; they are not good reasons to do so.

My first point was also made by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross and concerns the reliance that we place on the rule of law in relation to war for the protection of not only our armed forces, but our civilian population in a time of conflict. I made that point in Committee and it has never been addressed by anyone who has spoken in favour of amendments or in opposition to the Bill from the point of view that has been expressed by the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) or anyone else.

What message do we give other countries if we start to pick and choose when our soldiers will be subject to the rule of law in relation to war? What protection do we give our armed forces in the long term if we say to them that we are going into war in a situation where those with whom we are in conflict know that we have excused our armed forces from being subject to the jurisdiction of the court that will enforce these laws? If that cannot be answered other than by saying, "I am addressing this subject as a Member of the British Parliament", it does not stand examination.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that he cannot have his cake and eat it. The amendment would simply take into account article 124 and allow the armed forces to be exempt for seven years from article 8, which is the area of greatest concern to the armed forces and relates to a court over which we have precious little control, unlike the international tribunal over Yugoslavia, and to the nominations of the prosecutor and the judges. Britain has far less influence over how article 8 will be applied. For seven years, our armed forces will be able to see how the International Criminal Court works in respect of our armed forces. If, after seven years, we are content with the justice meted out by the British courts—as he rightly points out, British soldiers are subject to all the laws that the statute implements—we will be in a position to decide how the ICC is working. That is the purpose of the protection that we should be giving our armed forces.

Mr. Browne: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention which neatly brings me to my second point. I shall return to the nature of the reservation in article 124 and whether it can give our armed forces the comfort that the Opposition pretend that it can. That will be my third point. If we choose to take that reservation, what is sauce for the goose will be sauce for the gander, and every other country that has signed up to the statute—even some of those who were dismissed by the Opposition in Committee as being irrelevant to important international decisions because of their size, population or history—should be able to do the same thing. What sort of institution would we have if every nation exercised a seven-year opt-out for their armed forces, their nationals and crimes committed on their territory by other nationals? How would we then find out over seven years how the court dealt with crimes committed under article 8, when there would have been none for it to deal with? If every country exercised a reservation, as they would be entitled to do if we gave them the lead, there would be no seven-year history to rely on.

Why should we in the UK have the arrogance to say that the court should practise on other countries' nationals while we watch to see whether the standard of justice is good enough for ours? What sort of message is that for a civilised country to send?

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): We will hand over the selection of the prosecutor and judges of the International Criminal Court to all the nations that sign up, regardless of their size and weight. Would the hon. Gentleman be prepared to make such a change in relation to the United Nations, so that power was handed over to the General Assembly without the limitations of the Security Council? Does he understand the comparison?

Mr. Browne: That is not a true analogy. The statute has been agreed by sovereign nations that discussed and negotiated a draft statute in a concentrated fashion against a set of international standards that they all accepted. They arrived at the statute in that fashion and, as one of the countries that put considerable effort into the eventual shape of the statute, we have agreed to ratify it. Importantly, we also agreed to treat the statute with the respect that it deserves. We undertook to put our faith in it and to work to ensure that the ICC can deliver what we hope it will deliver for peace in the world and the protection of humanity.

At this stage, we cannot say, in effect, to the ICC, "Go away and practise on all the wee countries and when you have got it right and are up to a standard that we think is appropriate, then we will let our people be subject to its jurisdiction." We cannot do that.

Mr. Blunt: Yes, we can.

Mr. Browne: We can if we want to give up our leadership role. If we want to retain that role and imbue the court with the standards that have been generated by our system of justice—of which we are all rightly proud—we have to play an active role from the outset and have the confidence to make our citizens subject to its jurisdiction.

Mr. Blunt: Which other nation—other than France, which has taken this exemption—of those that will probably ratify the treaty, has the same commitment of its soldiers around the world as a contribution to international

[Mr. Blunt]

security as we have? Which other country has had a soldier die on active service in every single year since the second world war, other than the United Kingdom?

Mr. Browne: The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) earlier said, with heavy irony, that I know everything, but I do not know the answer to that question. There is no point in my pretending that I do or giving the hon. Gentleman some smart reply, but that is not the point. We are not talking about justice by weighted majority. Opposition Members' arguments seem to depend on the size of a country's armed forces, or whether the armed forces involved are British. The contribution of sovereign nations to international justice must not be judged according to the number of citizens that they have or according to the size of their standing armies. Their contribution must be judged according to principles of decency, law and justice.

Britain has given many of those principles to the world. Arguments about the ICC should be tested against those principles, not against some pretended self-interest.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): It is the national interest.

Mr. Browne: With respect, it is not the national interest. The Opposition are using the argument as an excuse to vote against the Bill. The new clause purports to offer a principled reason for opposition to the measure, but no real principle is at stake. The Opposition contribution to debate on this Bill, on Second Reading and in Committee, has been a total pretence. They have pretended that, in principle, they are in favour of it, but all the time they have been constructing an excuse to vote against it at this stage in its progress. The truth behind that pretence is now visible.

Mr. Blunt: The Government should call our bluff.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the new clause is a bluff. It will be called.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman has said that the Opposition are simply looking for a reason to vote against the Bill. That is not the case: we are concerned with the Bill as it stands. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) noted that Britain, like the United States and France, is one of the few countries that consistently deploys troops abroad. Does the hon. Gentleman consider it unprincipled of France to want protection for its armed forces when they are deployed internationally? Does he consider President Clinton unprincipled because, until the last moment, he refused to sign the statute in its current form—and then recommended that his successor did not ratify the statute?

Mr. Browne: I am not privy to the motivations of other countries or their leaders. I am not prepared to speculate, but I have been present through every minute of parliamentary deliberation on this Bill, on the Floor of the House and in Committee. The right hon. Member for Horsham cannot say as much. I have been present to hear the arguments and to test them.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham: My right hon. Friend has been able to read the debates.

Mr. Browne: The question is not whether the right hon. Gentleman can read the arguments: sometimes it is more important to see the expressions on people's faces, and their body language, when they speak. I have been present at all the debates, and I have come to a view on that informed basis. I have not had the opportunity to spend the same amount of time with President Clinton or the French Government. If I had had that opportunity, I would have been able to reach an informed view on the matters raised by the right hon. Gentleman. I therefore do not accept his invitation to speculate.

However, I suspect that the French know how much protection the reservation under article 124 will give their armed forces. I also suspect that the right hon. Member for Horsham did not know that when he first moved the new clause at the Dispatch Box, because it had to be pointed out to him that it applies only to article 8—not to crimes alleged to have been committed in contravention of articles 6 or 7.

Therefore, even if the right hon. Gentleman were to succeed in getting the new clause accepted, how could he tell our armed forces that they would never, over the seven-year period, be subject to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, or to the possibility of such jurisdiction? It is for the very reason that our armed forces might be subject to ICC jurisdiction that the whole of the court's jurisdiction should apply to Britain. In that way, we can ensure that the jurisdiction develops in the way that we want it to, in accordance with the standards that I described earlier.

For all those reasons, which I think are principled and logical, I oppose the new clause. Fundamentally, however, I oppose it to expose the reality behind it. The new clause is simply an excuse for Conservative Members to vote against the Bill.

5.15 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I strongly support the case so ably made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) in moving the new clause. It is vital, for a number of reasons.

Like the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), I was present at most of the Committee's sittings. As the Minister said, we had a constructive debate. The Minister was good enough to acknowledge that the issues raised by the Opposition were serious and that we had not been frivolous or wasted time. If we repeat some of the arguments that were advanced in Committee, it is only so that the House more widely should recognise that we had serious and responsible debates in Committee.

We are not talking about an ad-hoc tribunal such as that for Yugoslavia. The Bill will set up a supranational court for all time—that is what is so important. Protections have been built in, but there will be severe limitations on the influence that the United Kingdom can bring to bear over the passage of time. It is therefore right and proper for the

House of Commons to consider most carefully the Bill's implications. Indeed, it would be a denial of our duty to the people of this country not to do so.

The new clause seeks to give the Government—the next Conservative Government on 8 June, and the one after that—time to see how the court will evolve, given all the implications that it will have for our armed forces. The court will not be cast in stone for all time but evolve, and we will have very little influence over that evolution. We have already discussed at some length how the House will have very little influence over the decisions made by the Government in representing the British case as to how the court develops.

There are three issues at stake and three reasons why I believe that the new clause should be accepted. First, it is the primary responsibility of the House to ensure that we give every possible protection to Her Majesty's armed forces. They are charged with the responsibility, by this House—and, more directly, by the Government of the day—to carry out the wishes of the House and the Government in defending our national interests abroad and defending our territory at home. Members of our armed forces join up with the very real prospect that they may be called upon to lay down their lives for their country—not something that those of us who stand successfully for re-election on 7 June will be called upon to do.

My right hon. Friend drew attention to the remarks of the Chief of the Defence Staff. I have met him only once, but I believe him to be an extremely able man. I would prefer to rely on his judgment, I am afraid, than that of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan). Sir Michael Boyce has served with distinction in our armed forces. He understands what our armed forces are called upon to do, and he understands the implications. Ultimately, it will be his responsibility to carry out the wishes of the Government of the day. Therefore, it seems better to rely on his words than on those of probably any Member of the House.

I do not accuse the Government of indifference to the consequences for our armed forces of the passage of the Bill. However, as the Member for Aldershot—the home of the British Army—I think that the Government have not given full consideration to them. I do not refer to the way that the court would handle an accusation that members of Her Majesty's armed forces had contravened the articles of the statute of Rome, but to the evolution of the court—how things might occur in future and how our armed forces might be subject to such events.

Although there are members of the armed services in the constituency of every right hon. and hon. Member, and we all owe them a duty, I believe that the Conservative party has always been much more in tune with the concerns and needs of the armed forces. Labour Members may disagree, but that is my view.

My second point is that, in Committee, the Minister made great play of the fact that our armed forces would never be called on to face charges under the legislation. As the Foreign Secretary reminded us earlier, on Second Reading he said:

> "British service personnel will never be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court because any bona fide allegation will be pursued by the British authorities."—[*Official Report*, 3 April 2001; Vol. 366, c. 222.]

That, in essence, is the Government's case.

Mr. Robin Cook *indicated assent.*

Mr. Howarth: The Foreign Secretary nods in agreement.

However, the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham, which I want to emphasise to the Foreign Secretary, is that the Government are in no position to make that unequivocal guarantee. The Government rely on the principle of complementarity—a ghastly word that has been introduced specifically for this statute and its incorporation in United Kingdom law. That means that the United Kingdom will first hear any allegation made against a member of Her Majesty's forces. However, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister know that, under article 17 of the Rome statute, headed "Issues of admissibility", a case would be inadmissible where

> "The case has been investigated by a State which has jurisdiction over it and the State has decided not to prosecute the person concerned".

But a caveat follows:

> "unless the decision resulted from the unwillingness or inability of the State genuinely to prosecute".

The Foreign Secretary cannot tell us today that, in 10 or 15 years, the ICC may not take a contrary view. For example, what would happen if the United Kingdom decided that a military operation involving substantial loss of civilian life was none the less not a war crime under the measure, but the ICC took a different view? I speculate, but I am entitled to do so. If we decided not to prosecute in such a case, the court could say that, although the United Kingdom was unwilling to prosecute, the military operation was excessive and did not justify the resulting loss of civilian life. The people involved—possibly even our Prime Minister—could be brought before the court.

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman and I took part in some interesting debates in Committee. He raises an important point of principle in respect of the establishment of an international criminal court of any description, never mind the one that we are discussing. Against the standard that he sets, we cannot give our armed forces an unequivocal guarantee that they will not be brought before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which exercises a jurisdiction that is not complementary to but supersedes that of our domestic courts. Should we therefore withdraw our forces from their peacekeeping work in the former Yugoslavia?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman has made that point several times, and I defer to my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt), who has comprehensively demolished his argument on that score. That court was an ad-hoc tribunal, but the International Criminal Court will not be. It will be a major international institution, for all time to come. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) pointed out to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun the difference between the constitutions of the International Criminal Court and the United Nations, and between the influence that the United Kingdom has in the United Nations and its lack of influence in the International Criminal Court.

Mr. Browne: Is the hon. Gentleman arguing that if any of our forces came before the ICTY, we would

[Mr. Browne]

immediately withdraw our support for it? Is the difference between an ad-hoc tribunal and an established court simply that we can withdraw our support from an ad-hoc tribunal the moment that a UK national or member of the British armed forces comes before it? Is our support for international justice conditional on its not applying to us?

Mr. Howarth: The ICTY was set up during the conflict and at the end of the conflict, British troops obviously had not infringed. We are trying to anticipate scenarios where our troops could stand accused of having committed war crimes that were not considered, either by the Government of the United Kingdom or by our courts, to be war crimes.

The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point. He said that there was no guarantee that we could give our troops in respect of the ICTY. I repeat that the Foreign Secretary said:

> "British service personnel will never be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court".—[*Official Report*, 3 April 2001; Vol. 366, c. 222.]

Does the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun disagree with the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Browne *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman does not disagree with his right hon. Friend, but we are saying that the Foreign Secretary is in no position to give that guarantee, which he has sought to wave in front of Admiral Sir Michael Boyce and the rest of our armed forces.

Mr. Blunt: The point that my hon. Friend is making was illustrated by the Solicitor-General's promise in Committee concerning the fact that the prosecutor of the ICTY decided that the bombing of the television station did not amount to a crime, as far as the Prime Minister was concerned, and that he should not be brought to justice in front of The Hague tribunal. That was a decision of the prosecutor—a prosecutor over whom we had much greater influence and control than we shall have over the prosecutor—

Mr. Robin Cook: Withdraw.

Mr. Blunt: I heard the Foreign Secretary say, "Withdraw."

Mr. Cook *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Foreign Secretary cannot intervene on an intervention, even though he may, like me, have begun to wonder whether it was a speech.

Mr. Blunt: I shall deal with the point if you will let me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Foreign Secretary was saying, "Withdraw." Voting for the prosecutor in the International Criminal Court is by majority, and the United Kingdom and other states could be outvoted. It is clear that we have less influence over the selection of the prosecutor for the ICC than we did over that of the prosecutor in The Hague. That is the simple point that is being made, and so—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions have been getting longer and longer, and it would be better if hon. Members kept perorations out of them.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The exchanges illustrate the nonsense of the Government's position in having tried to rush this measure through and force us into a programme motion tonight. This is a very serious issue, which affects our country, and particularly our armed forces. It is a tragedy that the Government have sought to treat the matter in this way.

I said that I had three points to raise, and I have raised two. The first concerned our armed forces, and the second my belief that the complementarity argument was not a sufficient safeguard for our troops. Thirdly, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham mentioned, the French have reservations. I am not known for siding naturally with the French, but I can tell the Foreign Secretary that I love going on holiday to France, and that I have a French brother-in-law and a French motor car. I do not think that I can be accused of xenophobia.

Not only have the French entered reservations; so has the United States of America. I do not want to labour the point because I think that most members of the Standing Committee and most Members of the House are well aware that it was not until the dying hours of his somewhat discredited term of office that President Clinton signed the treaty and left the Senate to ratify the statute. It is clear that the Bush Administration are wholly hostile to ratification.

5.30 pm

Mr. Maude: Does my hon. Friend recollect that President Clinton not only signed the statute at the very last moment, but specifically said when doing so that it was only to preserve America's negotiating position and recommended that his successor should not ratify it?

Mr. Howarth: That is a most telling point and a powerful reason why the House should accept the new clause.

I think that I heard the Foreign Secretary on "Today" earlier this week or last week say that the United States was our closest ally. *[Interruption.]* I think that he is saying "Hear, hear", so he accepts that. If our closest ally has such reservations about the International Criminal Court, why do the Government want to rush headlong into ratifying the statute, failing to take advantage of the breathing space afforded by article 124?

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not give way because I want to conclude.

I remind the House that on 29 November last year, a group of very senior American public figures sent a note to the majority whip in the US House of Representatives expressing strong support for the American Servicemembers' Protection Act 2000, which was introduced to protect the sovereignty of the United States in respect of the International Criminal Court. The letter said:

> "War crimes and other human rights violations have long been subject to criminal penalties under U.S. law, and the United States has a far better record of enforcing its laws against human rights violations than some of the countries that support the ICC."

That letter was signed by a cast of senior people who were involved at the highest level of government in the most recent conflicts in which the United States and the United Kingdom have taken part: Lawrence Eagleburger, former Secretary of State; Caspar Weinberger, former Secretary of Defense; Henry Kissenger, former Secretary of State;

Donald Rumsfeld, former Secretary of Defense; George Shultz, former Secretary of State; James Baker, former Secretary of State.

Those men are hugely powerful, and they are protecting their armed forces. We should protect ours. One way in which the Government could do so, which would not undermine the Bill or the Government's position in respect of the International Criminal Court, would be to accept the new clause, thereby allowing us to derogate for seven years and buying ourselves some time while we see how the court develops.

Mr. Corbyn: I shall be brief because we are nearing the end of the debate.

I have a feeling that if the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) had been a Member of this House during the summer of 1945, he would have made exactly the same speech about why we should not ratify the United Nations charter, as, no doubt, he would have about the League of Nations covenant, the International Labour Organisation declaration and any international treaty there ever was.

We seem to be losing sight of the reality that the Bill has come about because of the revulsion of many people around the world at abuses of human rights and the unbridled power of dictatorships. They see the need to bring such dictators to heel if they are no longer to be the victims of the arbitrary power that is often held by military dictators and regimes.

I remember—I am sure that many hon. Members do—the trenchant defence of General Pinochet that was mounted by the hon. Member for Aldershot and some of his friends. They continue to do that but at no stage have they ever appeared to notice that thousands of people died in Chile at the hands of Pinochet and many others. Pinochet could not be brought to court under this process, because it is not retrospective. However, it will ensure that any country that signs up to the treaty will—yes—expose itself to possible prosecutions under it but, in doing so, it will set an example, a standard and a norm. That is why I strongly oppose the new clauses.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne) said, if we believe that every other country should sign up to the treaty and possibly put all their institutions before an international court, we should be prepared to do exactly the same. If Argentina, which has signed and ratified the treaty, has not asked for an exemption for its armed forces—and, my God, Argentine armed forces committed many human rights violations at the time of Operation Condor—what have we got to be afraid of? We should sign up to the treaty in its entirety.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: I understand that the hon. Gentleman wants Senator Pinochet to appear before the International Criminal Court, but does he want the President of China to appear before it too?

Mr. Corbyn: Although the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Standing Committee and I was not, I have pointed out to him on many occasions that it is not retrospective legislation. If any country that signs up to the treaty is accused of violations of human rights or matters that would bring it within the purview of the International Criminal Court, it should be brought within its purview. That is the basis of the process.

The idea that we should ask for an exemption for our armed forces is ridiculous. If we ask for that exemption, who are we to oppose anyone else's exemption? My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) pointed out—many of us have—the consequences of our asking for an exemption. What would happen if Indonesia said that it was happy to sign the treaty, but would not, at any stage, allow the Indonesian armed forces—many of us have seen what they are capable of in East Timor and other places—to be exposed to any prosecution under the law? That would be a joke, and everyone would know it.

It is important that all institutions are covered by the court, but we should remember that many of the worst violations of human rights are not carried out by statutory armed forces but by militia forces acting more or less on behalf of the armed forces. Let us consider what happened in East Timor, and is now happening in Aceh and West Papua in Indonesia, or events in Colombia. There are many other examples of armies and regimes using militia forces to carry out the most appalling violations of human rights.

The House has an opportunity today to allow the Bill to proceed. I regret the exemptions that are included in the Bill and that we shall not have time to debate them. I hope that, in another Parliament, we shall be able to return to the issue and deal with those exemptions, because I do not believe that the power of discretion that is held by the Attorney-General and the Foreign Secretary is necessarily within the spirit of the Bill's origins.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman referred to Indonesia, but does he not understand the position that Britain is in? Britain is one of the three western countries that consistently and properly deploy their troops abroad in peacekeeping and peacemaking operations. The other two are France and America, and Socialist Prime Minister Jospin and the former Democrat President Clinton have both seen grave dangers in subjecting their armed forces, which are involved in such operations, to the jurisdiction of the court. Why does he think that Britain's armed forces should uniquely in this group of three internationally oriented sets of armed forces be put in jeopardy in this way?

Mr. Corbyn: If we believe in the rule of law, in international conventions and in the power of a democracy to control its armed forces, what have we got to be afraid of? We should sign up to the treaty in its entirety.

It is obviously true that British armed forces are involved in various parts of the world. I sometimes wish that they were not. They are not always under the control of the United Nations; sometimes they are under NATO command. We are not the only country to deploy forces elsewhere. India, Ireland, Sweden and Canada do the same. Many not so large countries have often made significant contributions to the work of the UN. I hear no arguments from them that their armed forces should be exempt. We should reject the Opposition's isolationist arguments and the new clause. We need to put the Bill on the statute book and return to it so that it can be improved.

Mr. Battle: The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) was gracious enough to suggest that we had an important and serious debate on these matters in

[Mr. Battle]

Committee. That is also true of today's debate. New clause 3 is bit of a misnomer—it is actually a retread of a new clause that was discussed in Committee. Nevertheless, the debate has been rigorous, with good and telling contributions not least from my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne) and the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan).

The purpose of the new clause is to bind the Government to the opt-out for war crimes under article 124 of the Rome statute. It is a delaying measure. The more I listened to the debate, the more convinced I became that the Conservatives are not behind the Bill's principles. Contrary to their arguments, we have every reason to be bound by the provisions of article 8 of the ICC statute. The crimes set out in that article are already crimes in international law. That message has not gone home. Many were incorporated into domestic law by previous Conservative Administrations under the Acts to implement the Geneva conventions. Why do they want to tear them up? I was slightly surprised by the tone and direction of the debate.

Our armed forces already abide by those rules, against which their rules of engagement are drawn up and their conduct is judged. They are the rules by which they operate and, I believe, by which they excel in the practice of their duties. British troops serving in Bosnia or Kosovo are subject to international jurisdiction, which investigates allegations of the same crimes. The International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia is a good example to consider. The international jurisdiction has not hampered its operations, as some hon. Members suggested. We need to be more positive and say that without this measure, our armed forces will be hampered. We are providing positive protection to give them full and proper back-up. We are not undermining them, but strengthening the protection of our service personnel against others who will not abide by international law.

It is critical that we reject the new clause. It is also important to demonstrate leadership and stand up for the rule of law around the world. This country and its armed forces have been doing that on a daily basis for years. We should support them.

Mr. Blunt: Perhaps the Minister could explain why the French have made at least eight definitional declarations about what article 8 means in their declarations on signing the treaty.

Mr. Battle: I am happy to discuss France. The hon. Gentleman has followed our debates in detail and I am sure that he is aware that article 8 crimes are drawn from the first additional protocol of the Geneva conventions. Almost alone among NATO members, France has not signed that protocol. I suspect that its caution can be ascribed to that fact. However, we have signed and ratified the protocol. Indeed, that was done by the previous Administration. If they signed us up to the Geneva conventions, which are implemented in international law, there is no reason why we should not move forward and implement the ICC statute.

I told the House that if we exercise the opt-out, we will send the most appalling signal to those countries that we want to encourage to build the international institution and ensure that it is properly supported. On the Rome statute, Lord Kingsland said:

> "There is, however, one immense drawback . . . The drawback is that there is a seven year prohibition on the instigation of any prosecution for war crimes."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 July 1998; Vol. 592, c. 626.]

Even the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson in another place argued and agreed that there should not be an opt-out. I am surprised that the Opposition spokesperson in this place does not agree with what has been going on down the Corridor in the House of Lords.

The ICC poses no threat to our armed forces. It will have no impact on their rules of engagement. It will make no change to the fundamental laws of war under which our armed forces already operate, and which are part of the daily training of every British serving officer. The Ministry of Defence has been engaged at every stage in the elaboration of the statute and in the drafting of the Bill. It is content that the Bill gives full protection to our armed services.

I remind the Opposition that the former head of the Army legal services, Major General Tony Rogers, said:

> "When carrying out attacks on military objectives, we are already under a treaty obligation not to cause disproportionate incidental loss and damage to the civilian population."

He added:

> "The Geneva Conventions have been put to the test recently. I am not aware we had any problems complying with our treaty obligations during the Gulf War or 1991 or the Kosovo war of 1999."

The same point has been made by others, and I shall give an example. The hon. Member for Aldershot wanted to quote American examples. If he were to read the *Harvard International Law Journal*, he would find that Jocknick and Normand have written:

> "One claim has survived the twisted aftermath of the Gulf War intact—namely that the coalition used modern military techniques to comply with the fundamental legal requirements to distinguish between civilians and combatants more effectively than any belligerent in any past war."

General Colin Powell commented that the decisions were impacted on by legal considerations at every level and that the law of war proved invaluable in the decision-making process.

5.45 pm

Judge Richard Goldstone, the former prosecutor of the international tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, commented "I have no doubts that the fears are without justification at all. Firstly, the war crimes defined in the Rome statute are really the most serious war crimes internationally committed." We should remember that. We are talking about crimes of genocide—crimes against humanity. These are megacrimes. The judge added "In the second place, the ICC will not have jurisdiction at all over a British citizen if the British military and civil courts investigate in good faith any allegations made."

Ten current and former presidents of the United States Society of International Law, replying precisely to the letter that the hon. Member for Aldershot read out and prayed in aid, said:

> "Seldom in the course of public discussion of a great international issue have so many great and good former officials been so misinformed about fundamental principles of international law.

Without some international agreement to the contrary, the American airman shot down, for example, while carrying out a bombing mission over foreign territory will under customary international law be subject to territorial jurisdiction of a target state. This is not a newly minted principle of customary international law."

Similarly, what we are doing is not new and is not a newly minted principle. We are continuing the proud and honourable role that the United Kingdom has played in the development and enforcement of international humanitarian law. We have a history and a tradition that go back to the 17th century of drawing up rules of engagement, and we have been proud to be part of that process.

Britain has played a full part in the development of the laws of war. It was Conservative Governments who passed the relevant legislation in 1957 and 1995 that enabled the ratification of the Geneva conventions and the additional protocols.

There have been some interesting exchanges during this debate. The more the shadow Foreign Secretary was challenged by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, the more his arguments were exposed. He does not simply have reservations about the details of the Bill. The right hon. Gentleman demonstrated that the Conservatives oppose the Bill in principle and that their amendments are stalking horses for blocking it and ensuring that it does not take its place on the statute book. I recommend that we reject the new clause.

Mr. Maude: This has been a useful debate because it has established beyond any doubt the fact that the Foreign Secretary is simply not able to give a binding assurance to our armed forces that they will be secure against vexatious prosecutions conducted under the Bill. The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne) has made it clear that that possibility cannot be excluded under the Bill in its current form. Frankly, we heard some thoroughly bogus arguments from Government Members. The case was made that, somehow, article 124 does not apply to war crimes; it permits article 8 on war crimes not to be applied to a country's armed forces, which is why the French exercised their opt-out.

British armed forces are in a special position because they, along with the French and the Americans, are consistently deployed abroad. The Americans have made their decision; President Clinton—not President Bush—said that he would not ask the Senate to ratify the treaty, nor would he recommend that his successor did so. Socialist Prime Minister Jospin—

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

Question put and negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 73.

Division No. 209] **[5.51 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
  (Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
  (NE Fife)
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caton, Martin
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
  (B'ham Hodge H)
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
Macdonald, Calum
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John
  (Aberavon)
Mullin, Chris

Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Stevenson, George
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann
(Dewsbury)
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Trend, Michael
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown
and
Mr. Peter Atkinson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

PETITION

TransBus plc

6.7 pm

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I wish to present a petition on behalf of Jean May Taylor and Graham Collins, my constituents, and of more than 3,500 local people from Scarborough who wish to see the devastating announcement by TransBus plc concerning the closure of the Plaxton bus and coach factory at Eastfield in my constituency reconsidered by the company, and to have the support of this House to achieve that aim.

The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of Jean May Taylor and Graham Collins constituents of Scarborough and Whitby constituency and North Yorkshire sheweth

That TransBus plc has announced the proposed closure of the Plaxton bus and coach factory, Eastfield on Thursday 3rd May 2001, thereby denying its 700 employees future employment and consequential loss of employment opportunities in Scarborough and North Yorkshire with associated companies and the potential collapse of the local economy.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urge TransBus plc to reconsider the proposed closure of their Eastfield factory after assessment of future market opportunities in the United Kingdom and their responsibilities to employees, local communities and the Scarborough economy; note the establishment of the Eastfield rapid reaction taskforce to secure a satisfactory sustainable solution for job opportunities in the Scarborough area; and support the representations by the Honourable Member for Scarborough and Whitby to Her Majesty's Government for the enhancement of economic prospects for Scarborough and Whitby by consideration of special assisted area status, progress on upgrading of the A64 transport corridor and the fullest support for the Eastfield rapid reaction taskforce.

I pray that the House will support this petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Flood Defence

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

6.9 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): We unexpectedly have longer to debate the important subject of flood defence than we anticipated. I hope that we will not take up the entire time until 7.30 pm, but the issue is critical for residents of south Derbyshire, and I am glad to be able to raise it in this Parliament.

In early November last year, many households in my constituency suffered the terrible experience of flooding. In the worst hit village of Hatton, 142 properties were flooded, and many people experienced the misery of sewage flowing back into their homes. Other villages along the Trent and Dove, including Willington, Barrow on Trent, Scropton, Hilton and Shardlow experienced severe disruption and the flooding of some properties. Local land drainage failures caused flooding in other villages such as Stanton.

In most cases, defences that were the responsibility of the Environment Agency were overtopped, but other drainage problems often contributed to the damage. Emergency services responded well, but were stretched to the limit. Since the floods, repairs and restoration have been the main preoccupation of many lives. Some people fully reoccupied their homes only very recently.

The various public agencies that are responsible in the area—the Environment Agency, parish, district and county councils and the sewerage operator, Severn Trent—tried first to understand what happened and secondly to explain events. They are now starting to produce solutions that may prevent repetition in some areas. Some remedies have been agreed—for example, the repair and slight raising of the defences on the Foston brook. In other cases, however, there is far more to do.

Considerable scrutiny of events has occurred nationally. That is hardly surprising in view of the scale of the disaster. The Environment Agency produced its report, entitled "Lessons Learned", and the National Audit Office has published a report on inland flood defence. The Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Select Committee on Agriculture have also produced relevant reports. I want to draw out some key points that were made in several reports and reflect the south Derbyshire experience.

First, I shall quote from "Lessons Learned", which states:

> "The attribution of responsibility for the management of water courses posing a significant flood risk needs to be reassessed."

It is not clear in my area why some water courses are the responsibility of the Environment Agency and others are not, when their interdependence as drainage mechanisms is clear.

When the Agriculture Committee took evidence from the Environment Agency, reference was made to the accident of the agency being responsible for some water courses while others were left in the hands of riparian owners. One Environment Agency representative said that that often related to the membership of flood defence committees and the influence that certain landowners had exerted in the past, the results of which had been passed on to the agency. There is no logic to the assignation of responsibility for water courses.

Secondly, when water courses are the specific responsibility of riparian owners, their performance is supposed to be monitored and enforced by local authorities. Many local authorities choose not to carry out that function or believe that they cannot. In reply to a parliamentary question that I tabled on 2 May, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food listed seven councils that were not prepared to inspect flood defences, 12 that had failed to respond to Environment Agency inquiries and 115 that were unable to carry out inspections or did not believe that they had the resources to do the job. That renders a holistic grasp of flood defence in many areas impossible.

Scrutiny of the list of councils that the Minister provided to me reveals that many of them cover areas that were severely afflicted by the floods last October and November. Although, fortunately, none of the councils in my area were included on the list, I think that many hon. Members would be surprised to discover the attitude displayed by their local authorities to such a critical issue. It is also true that, relying on the activity of individual local authorities causes grave inconsistencies both in the standard of inspection that is achieved, when there are inspections, and in the precise measures that are used to identify shortcomings.

There are solutions to that problem. In its "Lessons Learned" report, the Environment Agency sets out quite clearly a view that I strongly endorse: the Environment Agency should have either the power to inspect or the power to compel others to inspect. Clearly that would require either additional resources for the Environment Agency to perform the role itself or additional powers for it to force unwilling local authorities to act. That however brings us to the third issue, which concerns the resources applied to doing the job.

It is clear that the resources available both to the Environment Agency and to local authorities are inadequate. One can certainly draw that lesson from the responses of local authorities, especially as many of the 115 local authorities that I mentioned said that they would have liked to fulfil that responsibility but felt that they did not have sufficient resources to do so.

Research done by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food itself has shown that additional funding is required for flood defence, which is a point that is reiterated in the "Lessons Learned" report. The National Audit Office report, which focused on the state of our flood defences, said that asset surveys completed up to last autumn showed that, as regards standards of preparedness to meet their objective, 40 per cent. of flood defence assets fall into the categories of fair, poor or very poor.

Fourthly, some expenditure is urgently required. We should review the decision-making process and the criteria used in deciding on flood defence construction. In my area, parts of the village of Hatton have defences intended to protect for only one in 10 years. The defences of the rest of the village, with one small exception, were intended to protect for one in 100 years. As the Environment Agency points out in its "Lessons Learned" report, we should support consistent standards across individual communities.

[Mr. Mark Todd]

It would be difficult for me to defend to the citizens of Hatton the proposition that we expect lower maintenance levels and less flood protection in one area of Hatton than in another area that is just the other side of a railway track that forms the major defence for the rest of the village. That is not a defensible position, and I am glad that the Environment Agency is highlighting it as one of the issues that must be addressed in deciding on future defences.

We should review the criteria on which investment decisions are based. Sadly, not everyone in south Derbyshire was properly insured against flooding, so that some householders themselves have had to bear the cost of the damage. Nevertheless, currently, the costs that householders or, in most cases, their insurers have to bear are not those that are allowed for in the cost benefit analysis that is performed in justifying individual flood defence projects. Value added tax, which is ignored, is one obvious exception. However, most insurers have a replace-as-new policy, which is usually what householders prefer to trying to find a second-hand item that precisely matches the items lost in the flood. Those essentially modern-day views of the actual cost of flooding are not taken into account in the cost benefit analyses that are used to justify defences.

In the particular case of Hatton, this is likely to mean that upgrading the defences in the area beyond the railway line will be hard to justify against the criteria. The Environment Agency has carried out an initial analysis and there is more work to be done, so it is important not to prejudge that, but it has already indicated to me the difficulties of defending this particular group of houses and meeting the criteria that have been set down.

Fifthly, the Government have published welcome draft revisions of PPG25 to tighten control on flood plain development. They have also decided to consult on my proposal—inserted in the report by the Select Committee on Agriculture—that the Environment Agency has the right to call in for public inquiry applications with which it disagrees.

Currently, a local authority can choose to ignore the advice of the Environment Agency when it has reservations about construction on a flood plain. In my view, that power has led to foolish and inappropriate developments in the past, which in some cases have placed the residents of those developments at risk and in others have inconvenienced other people by occupying part of a flood plain that was there for a purpose—to hold water when we faced flood conditions. Clearly developments of that kind place at risk property, and in extreme cases, lives. The Environment Agency should have the power to insist on a public inquiry to examine an application on which it dissents.

Sixthly, we must integrate the sewage operators in our flood defence framework. I shall again quote some local examples. It is clear that planning decisions often make optimistic assumptions about local domestic surface water drainage or systems that have decayed through local adaptation over time. What tends to happen is that when a new housing estate is constructed, the developer agrees that domestic surface water drainage will not go into the main sewage system, but instead go into soak-aways. Over time, people make adaptations to their properties and end up with the surface water drainage going into the foul water system and overloading it. Sometimes the tests that are carried out to work out whether a soak-away will actually work in an area where the water table is very high—as it is in the village of Hatton—or in a low-lying area, make assumptions that are unsound.

The first priority must be to make sure that that is clearly understood, because the linkage with the foul water system and then with the effectiveness of other surface water systems is critical. In some cases foul water systems critically depend, at overflow, on the effectiveness of surface water systems; and if the foul water system is supposed to overflow into a surface water system at times of crisis and is already over the top, then predictably, the foul water system will swiftly back up into the houses. That is what happened in Hatton, and villagers have rightly asked a lot of questions about the design of the sewage system and its ability to deal with reasonably predictable demand; and about the failure of Severn Trent Water to spot warning signals in respect of the performance of the sewage system in the past when residents regularly complained about the systems backing up or flooding into garden areas.

Regrettably, at times of very high rainfall and flooding across the fields from Foston brook breach, that led to immense crisis in the village, with many people facing the most unpleasant experiences. Flooding is bad enough, but finding foul water coming back into one's house is a deeply depressing and distressing experience.

As I have said, if the evidence of Hatton is typical, the links between the various elements of the system are not always properly understood. In Hatton, it was only after the event that Severn Trent, the Environment Agency and the local authority looked at the relationship between the various parts of the system and realised that some of the interdependence did not function properly. Clearly the sewage operators must be part of any framework of future planning.

We must also be innovative. It is a truism that defences built in one place simply direct water elsewhere. Water does not disappear when flood defences are constructed: it is displaced and flows to another location. Defences built in one place are often to the disadvantage of people somewhere else, and more strategic planning is required. I welcome the catchment planning that is being carried out in five pilot projects, as described in a parliamentary answer that I received last week. I am sad that those five areas will not benefit my constituency, but the principle of viewing flooding strategically is sound. I hope that the pilot studies prove successful and, if so, are rapidly emulated elsewhere.

We should, however, examine carefully the role of soft defences against flooding and how we can work with riparian farmers to ensure compatible land use, allowing flood dispersal and water storage in periods of heavy rain. It is clear that intensive agriculture, including density of livestock and crop choices, has substantial implications for the ability of a field system near a water course to absorb significant amounts of water when flooding takes place. Farmers in that position should be given a substantial incentive to cultivate their land, and practise animal husbandry, in ways that will allow flood dispersal on land that is less vulnerable than populated areas. That is an important function for which farmers could receive financial recognition. At a time when we are considering how to reconfigure agriculture and learn some of the lessons of the past few years, farmers could be invited to play a critical role in such circumstances. That role could be readily defended to the rest of the community as an appropriate subsidy and support for the agriculture sector.

Most experts predict that extreme weather conditions will become more common, so low-lying areas such as much of south Derbyshire require a far higher priority to be given to both strategy and the local delivery of flood defence and management.

I hope that the Government re-elected in four weeks' time will have the chance to give further thought to what I have said this evening and to the various reports produced in the past few weeks, in order to develop appropriate responses that will give comfort to the citizens of south Derbyshire who suffered so grievously. They are merely representative of many other people around the country who also look for much higher priority and greater strategic thought to be given to this critical subject which, for too long, has bumbled along in the background of Government thinking. It has been subject to the normal compromises of British thought, which involve the division of responsibilities among a variety of agencies, and men and women of goodwill co-operating together on common goals. Sadly, in the modern world, that, increasingly, is not a workable framework for dealing with a critical subject of strategic importance, which is what flood defence and flood management have become.

6.30 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, and on his detailed presentation of his case. He covered the villages that he represents—Hatton, Scropton, Willington, Barrow on Trent, Swarkstone, Shardlow, Ambaston and Egginton—and I should like to express my sympathy for the difficulties experienced by those of his constituents who have been affected by floods. I understand how distressing floods can be, and that the problem is even worse when foul water is involved.

One of the problems identified by my hon. Friend was that the floods experienced by his constituents happened because of a combination of factors. It is certainly true that there was over-topping of the river defences, but in addition the volume of water caused sewers to back up. The amount of surface water also posed difficulties.

I understand the points made by my hon. Friend that arise from the "Lessons Learned" report on the recent flooding. Those matters include determining where responsibility for water courses lies, the roles of riparian owners and of their internal drainage boards, main and non-main river designations, and the high-level targets that I have set for the Environment Agency and local authorities.

I share my hon. Friend's concern that many authorities seem not to have made much progress, and I shall touch on that in a moment, but I want to deal first with the problem of flooding in Hatton. He was right to say that it was caused by the River Dove rising so high that the Hatton sewage pumping station was flooded. As a result, the sewage system was flooded and the Foston flood defence bank was breached. Floodwater entered the sewage system through the combined foul and highway sewers.

Since the flooding, Severn Trent Water has worked to improve and protect the sewage network in and around Hatton. I understand that the company has effectively isolated the sewage system from the River Dove, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that. That should prevent the pumping station from being flooded if the river breaches its banks again.

The company has also installed additional capacity at the pumping station to enable overflows to be pumped to a ditch. It has undertaken maintenance work on sewers in the area, which has included a closed-circuit television survey, cleaning work to improve the flow, and some repairs to prevent the infiltration of ground water into the sewers. An extensive study of the sewage systems in Hatton and the surrounding villages has begun, and will include some computer modelling. One-to-one interviews with householders have been carried out, and some householders have had non-return valves fitted to their drainage systems to prevent sewage back-flow problems.

Severn Trent Water has also maintained close liaison with developers in the area to ensure that any new buildings do not have an adverse effect on the existing sewage system, or on existing residents. It deserves some credit for adopting a comprehensive approach to the problem in response to the concerns by my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend raised a range of other matters, and I shall try to deal with them. I recognise that the arrangements for flood and coastal defence are complex, but he was a member of the Select Committee that looked into the matter, and so knows the arrangements better than most.

The Environment Agency has a general supervisory duty for flood defence, but local authorities and internal drainage boards also have a role to play. Flooding from sewers is the responsibility of the local water and sewage company, whereas surface water is usually the responsibility of the relevant highways authority.

Although a number of agencies are involved, I do not believe that an efficient and co-ordinated response is impossible. That is what we are trying to put in place by setting the high-level targets after the winter floods. We have asked all operating authorities to produce publicly available policy statements setting out their approach to flood and coastal defence and showing the water courses for which they are responsible. Those authorities must also say how they would manage flood risks on those water courses. Those statements will help to illuminate local approaches and give local communities the information by which they can judge the performance of these bodies.

I recognise that this does not apply to the bodies responsible for sewers and surface waters. The Environment Agency has discussed with me the idea of using its Floodline service, which was very successful in the recent floods—it gave people a point of contact as well as providing information and updates—as a one-stop approach for all those who suffer flooding, from wherever it may be. That includes problems with surface water and drains. This is probably a longer-term aspiration. It is important first to establish local partnerships and secure local agreement between the agency and the other bodies involved, which will be assisted through the development of an effective emergency plan in the light of last autumn's experiences.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

I am also prepared to consider the institutional arrangements for flood and coastal defence more generally in the light of the findings of the review of funding arrangements and the financial management and policy review of the Environment Agency. Both reviews are currently under way and will be reporting their findings this year. That will be an opportunity for considering a range of issues, including the funding and structural mechanisms, relating to the way in which we carry out flood and coastal defence in this country.

My hon. Friend referred to the willingness of local authorities to carry out inspections of flood defences and critical ordinary water courses. He referred to his parliamentary question and the answer that I gave him. The long list of local authorities that had not, for various reasons, responded in the kind of detail that we expected, was very disappointing.

There is an associated high-level target that authorities should identify flood defences for which they are responsible. It is possible that some of the authorities on the list do not have any such responsibilities. However, these inspections are required under our high-level targets and the approach was agreed at a meeting with senior members of the Local Government Association. There is a related high-level target for the Environment Agency to report on flood defence inspections and its assessment of flood risk. That is expected shortly. I have asked the agency's chairman to ensure that the report provides a full analysis of the inspection problems. That includes an analysis of the response that we have had from local authorities so far. I want to assure my hon. Friend that we take this matter seriously.

My hon. Friend touched generally on the economic appraisal. He knows how that operates in relation to the methodology that we use in determining priority scores for where the resources should go for flood defence schemes. We cannot get away from the fact that there will always be more demand for spending on flood and coastal defence than can be provided in any one year. In that respect, it is right and proper to have a mechanism that identifies priority. Therefore, those with the most need get the schemes put in place as quickly as possible.

Mr. Todd: I accept what my hon. Friend has said. However, he will need to think about two issues—the scale of the total pot available for carrying out the schemes, as that will obviously influence the number of priority schemes that are available, and the precise mechanism that is used to determine the cost and benefit of each scheme, which I referred to in my speech.

Mr. Morley: I accept those points. We are reviewing the scoring system and have just started a formal consultation process on the way in which the system works. We will, of course, reflect carefully on the comments that we receive from people who respond to the consultation.

Funding is, in many ways, the crux of the issue, as it determines what can be provided. I am glad to say that the Government have increased funding for flood and coastal defence as part of the 2000 comprehensive spending review. Following the devastating floods of last autumn, which in many cases were the worst for more than 100 years, we made available an additional £51 million over the next four years. That was announced last November. That money was mainly to accelerate river defence schemes and to allow catchment flood management plans to proceed. I very much appreciate my hon. Friend's welcome for that.

We have also put together a package of £11.6 million to fund the Environment Agency's exceptional costs in responding to last year's floods and carrying out emergency repairs. That sum is available in the current financial year, so that the agency can deal with those matters. In total, more than £400 million a year is being spent on flood and coastal defence in England. That sum is not far away from the proposal for the appropriate sum made in the independent assessment commissioned by the Ministry.

Mr. Todd: I was about to ask about the relationship with the survey carried out by MAFF. Although there is obviously some relationship, the amount set aside is substantially less than the amount identified in that survey. Furthermore, many of the local authorities which replied so unfavourably—as my hon. Friend and I agree—referred to resource problems in carrying out their responsibility. Finally, the survey on the state of our current defences showed—as I said—that 40 per cent. of those defences fall into the "fair or below" category. That demonstrates a huge shortfall merely in the routine maintenance of our existing defences.

Mr. Morley: Yes, my hon. Friend is right again, although many of the levies raised by the regional flood defence committees, which are responsible for the day-to-day management and upkeep of flood defences, were specifically for this financial year so that some of those maintenance issues could be addressed.

There is considerable regional disparity. Some regions are extremely good but in others, such as Yorkshire, a high percentage of defences are classified as "fair" or "poor". However, I do not want to give the impression that to classify a defence as "fair" means that it is in immediate risk of falling down—that is not the case. Furthermore, only a small number of defences are classified as "poor". Nevertheless, we need to deal with those issues.

I accept that we need to consider whether we are committing enough resources for flood and coastal defence overall. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that a study is under way to examine whether there should be even further increases in investment in flood and coastal defence. That study is linked to research that we have commissioned into the possible effects of climate change.

If there is a change in weather patterns due to climate change, with more extremes of weather of the kind that we experienced during the past winter, we must plan ahead for that. That means committing additional resources and examining what they should be, as well as considering the implications of the possible impact of changed weather patterns. That is being done.

We are also reviewing the funding arrangements for flood and coastal defence—the mechanisms, rather than the global sums. That report is due to be published in September. I can thus reassure my hon. Friend that a great deal of work is being done on flood defence.

We are holding this debate on one of the warmest days of the year thus far; the sun is shining so perhaps this is not the kind of day on which people think about storms, floods and coasts, but we have to keep planning for them. I assure my hon. Friend that the issue is constantly in the back of my mind. At MAFF, we constantly think ahead about a long-term strategic approach, such as that recommended by the Select Committee. Of course, when I see the sun shining at present, all I can think of is that the foot and mouth virus is clearing up, so that cheers me up no end.

My hon. Friend mentioned soft defence. He might be interested to know that, as part of the response to the autumn floods, I have approved the appointment of an independent expert engineer from the Institution of Civil Engineers. His remit is to consider innovative ideas that might inform the way that we approach flood defence schemes. I met the committee concerned and made it very clear to its members that they should not feel restrained by current or traditional thinking in relation to hard engineering, and that they should embrace the idea of soft defence as part of sustainable flood and coastal defence schemes. Indeed, a combination of the two might be used. I am sure that the members of the committee do not feel restrained in their thinking.

My hon. Friend made a powerful case on behalf of his constituents tonight. I understand their concern, and his concern, to see progress and to see the results of the investments that we are making and the reviews that we are conducting in relation to flood defence. I am pleased that work is being done in relation to the sewerage problem, which was one of the key factors in the flooding of the area. The reports will be published in the course of this year, and I am sure that there will be a continuing debate about the nature of our flood defence schemes and the appropriate level of commitment.

As a Government, we recognise that we may be moving into a period of climate change. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has said many times that the floods that we experience should be taken as a wake-up call to the dangers of global warming and climate change. I very much hope that President Bush heeds that wake-up call in relation to the need for a global approach to climate change.

I can assure my hon. Friend that we recognise that there are implications for investment for the long term, and that we will make that investment for the long term, for the defence of his constituents and the people of this country.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 11 May 2001

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On this, our last full parliamentary day, may I wish you every success in your parliamentary re-election campaign? I am sure that it will be smooth and uneventful, and will return you to us safely—or at least to those of us who will be here after the election.

I seek your advice, Mr. Speaker, because until 5 o'clock on Monday we will all be Members of Parliament and able to fulfil our duties correspondingly, but after that those of us who are seeking re-election will be mere candidates. I am pursuing our embassy in Rio de Janeiro on a matter on behalf of my constituent, Mr. Williams, and I get the feeling that the embassy is incompetent or, worse, stonewalling, possibly until it thinks that I am safely out of way as a Member of Parliament. Can you think of any way in which those of us who are in our dying hours as MPs, about to be reduced to mere candidates, can still exercise some influence on behalf of our former constituents with recalcitrant bureaucrats, diplomats and worse? Any help that you can give me and other Members will be much appreciated.

Mr. Speaker: I would not advise the right hon. Gentleman to go personally to Rio de Janeiro to try to sort out the matter. He is a persistent individual, and all that I can advise is persistence. It is nice of a fellow Glaswegian to wish me well in the general election, and given that I am a non-party candidate the right hon. Gentleman is welcome to come up to Glasgow to give me a hand.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as a non-Glaswegian, I endorse those sentiments. In view of my right hon. Friend's persistence and loquacity, could you arrange for the Chamber to be opened on Monday so that he can come here and speak until 5 o'clock?

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you been informed of any recommendation, decision or thought of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about keeping Members and ex-Members informed about foot and mouth disease, which is still serious in certain counties?

If I may, I will go further than my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), and say that the House deserves to thank you for the difficult task, which you have taken on, of following a well-respected Speaker. You have certainly made your own mark, and I pay tribute to you for so doing. If you could help us on agriculture, it would be even better.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his typical kindness to me. Like all hon. Members, I recognise that this is a terrible time for rural areas. Without taking sides, I can safely say that the Minister of Agriculture has been very good in coming to the House and giving an account of what is going on. He will take note of the fact that contact with, and easy access to, the Ministry has to be maintained throughout the election to ensure that rural communities are looked after in the best way possible. I think that is the most that I can say on the matter.

Before I start the main business, I acknowledge that there are many Members present, including right hon. Gentlemen on both sides of the House, who are retiring. We will miss you all.

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR WALES BILL (PROGRAMME) (No. 3)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Children's Commissioner for Wales Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 16th January and 8th February:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

2. Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

3. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—[*Mr. McNulty.*]

Orders of the Day

Children's Commissioner for Wales Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

Application of Part 5 of the
Care Standards Act 2000

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 1, line 28, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

"(3) For subsection (6) substitute—

"(6) Regulations may provide for the references to a child in subsection (1) to include references to a person (including a child) who was at any time (including a time before the commencement of this Part)—

(a) a child ordinarily resident in Wales;

(b) a child to or in respect of whom services were provided in Wales by, or on behalf of or under arrangements with, a person mentioned in Schedule 2B; or

(c) a child to or in respect of whom regulated children's services in Wales were provided.""

9.38 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hanson): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

I thank you for your remarks, Mr. Speaker. Government Members wish you well in your attempt at parliamentary re-election, and you certainly know where our sympathies lie regarding your subsequent re-election attempt.

I hope that the amendments will not be controversial. There have been no Divisions in the other place or the Commons on these matters. This is a technical amendment, which will extend the application of part 5 of the Care Standards Act 2000 to ensure that the commissioner can exercise his jurisdiction in respect of dead children and those who, sadly, die in circumstances that he may wish to investigate.

The Government have re-examined clause 1, and we believe that there may be some doubt about the commissioner's jurisdiction in respect of such children. Given the tragic circumstances in cases such as that of Anna Climbie, of which the whole House will be aware, it is important that we ensure that the commissioner can consider the role of relevant agencies in Wales if he wishes to investigate following the death of a child. I hope that there will be general support for the amendment. I have had discussions with Opposition parties, and I know that they support it. I commend it to the House.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I, too, wish those Members who are retiring, some of whom are present in the Chamber, a happy retirement, especially the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). Although we hope that his will not be a full retirement, he is departing this Parliament and we wish him well for the future. On a personal note, I should like to say to another Member who has taken a special interest in children's issues, the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), that I wish her every joy in whatever she does after leaving Parliament.

We welcome the amendments. The Minister is right to say that they did not cause division along party lines in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), who led on many of the issues in Committee, made many of the same points that the Minister has made today. We are glad that the Government have reconsidered their position and tabled the amendments. The fact that the Bill is to receive Royal Assent is welcome to us, albeit with one caveat, which is that we hoped that it would extend to England as well. However, that can be dealt with in future. I agree with the Minister's comments. The Conservatives will be happy to support the amendment.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): I, too, support the amendment. I congratulate the Government on getting the Bill through late in the Parliament when it could easily have got lost. I am glad on behalf of the children of Wales that it did not.

As Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which first recommended the establishment of a Children's Commissioner for Wales, I am pleased that the Assembly has seen fit to implement our recommendation. There is a possibility that jurisdiction might be extended to England from Wales. In our latest inquiry, we are considering the position of children who are in custody in England, whose rights might not be as good as they would be in Wales. I hope that the Government take that further when they are re-elected and that they establish commissioners throughout the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hanson: On the extension of commissioners to other parts of the UK, the Government will examine the role of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. The Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), will reflect on the Welsh experience. There will be opportunities to consider the matter further. I am grateful for the Opposition's support for the amendment.

I echo the good wishes to right hon. and hon. Members who are retiring from Parliament. I know that some will speak later today.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 3

Principal aim of the Commissioner

Lords amendment: No. 2, in line 21, leave out

"by the Assembly of any function"

and insert

"of any function of the Assembly".

Mr. Hanson: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 3 and 6.

Mr. Hanson: The amendments are technical amendments that have been discussed with the Opposition, considered in the other place and received full support from Members in both Houses.

There are circumstances in which the Assembly and the bodies listed in schedule 2 may delegate the exercise of their functions to other persons: for example, the Assembly delegates its duties to provide careers advice to the careers service. It is important that the commissioner's review function under clause 3 extends to all the Assembly's functions and to the functions of other bodies listed, whoever exercises them. Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3 will remove any doubt about whether the commissioner can do that.

Lords amendment No. 6 is another Government amendment that will add community councils in Wales to the list of bodies whose exercise of functions is subject to review by the commissioner under clause 3. The issue of adding community or town councils was raised by Members in another place on the basis that such councils, especially larger ones, occasionally exercise functions that affect children: for example, provision of playgrounds and recreational facilities. The Government have considered that argument and agree that the addition is appropriate. The Wales Association of Community and Town Councils has been informed and welcomes the change, as does the National Assembly. There is cross-party support for the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 3 agreed to.

After Clause 4

Lords amendment: No. 4, to insert the following new clause—

"*Additional power of consideration and representation*

(1) After section 75 of the Care Standards Act 2000 (c. 14) insert—

"*75A Additional power of consideration and representation*

(1) The Commissioner may consider, and make representations to the Assembly about, any matter affecting the rights or welfare of children in Wales.

(2) The function of the Commissioner under subsection (1) is exercisable only where he does not have power to consider and make representations about the matter in question by virtue of any other provision of this Act or any other enactment."."

(2) In section 74 of that Act—

(a) in subsection (1), after "may" insert ", in connection with the Commissioner's functions under this Part,"; and

(b) after that subsection insert—

"(1A) The reference in subsection (1) to functions of the Commissioner does not include a reference to his power to consider and make representations by virtue of section 75A(1)."

9.45 am

Mr. Hanson: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 5.

Mr. Hanson: The amendments are more substantial than the technical amendments that we have considered hitherto. The Government have reflected on the issues and taken steps in the other place to ensure that this House has the opportunity to discuss the amendments. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan) and for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), who raised the matter in Committee and persuaded the Government to table amendments.

The Government have carefully considered the concerns expressed about the commissioner having no formal role in respect of policies and services that do not come within the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales. As a result, we tabled the amendment that will empower the commissioner to consider, and make representations to the National Assembly for Wales on, any matter that affects the rights and welfare of children in Wales. That means that the commissioner will have a formal role in matters that do not fall within the National Assembly's devolved responsibilities.

I hope that will reflect the commissioner's relationship with the Assembly and the need to establish a structure for the new function, which has the potential to be extremely wide. The commissioner could, if he wanted, make representations on several matters as a part of his annual report to the Assembly, or ad hoc as he considers necessary. The Assembly will then be able to consider the commissioner's representations on matters that are Government responsibilities, and make representations to the Government under section 33 of the Government of Wales Act 1998.

The commissioner is an integral but independent part of the strategy of the National Assembly for Wales. The Government have been pleased to support the extension of the role and responsibilities of the commissioner. We remain firmly of the opinion that the commissioner's main field of jurisdiction should be bodies that have functions within the Assembly's devolved responsibilities. However, there will be opportunities for the commissioner to consider issues that are Government responsibilities and to make representations to the Assembly so that it can consider them and, if need be, using its powers under the Government of Wales Act, make representations to the Government.

I hope that we shall have cross-party support for the change. I have discussed the matter with right hon. and hon. Members and I believe that it is welcome in both Houses.

Mrs. Browning: I welcome the amendments. The reason that we have not heard about the Bill for some time might be that the Government were busy reading the Committee *Hansard* and considering the sensible proposals made by my hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and for North Dorset (Mr. Walter). If so, I am pleased to see that the Minister has taken their arguments on board.

The scope for the commissioner and the role that he is to perform on behalf of children in Wales mean that he must have powers that will enable him fully to represent children's interests when they are in question. Representations were made to the Government while the Bill was in Committee: the Minister knows that the National Assembly itself, with many voluntary and charitable organisations, recommended that the commissioner should have a role that extended beyond the constraints of the Assembly.

[Mrs. Browning]

In its report on the Children's Commissioner for Wales, the Health and Social Services Committee of the National Assembly said:

> "We have given consideration as to whether the Commissioner's remit should include policy and services that affect children in Wales but for which responsibility has not been devolved to the Assembly, such as the benefit system.

That is not a devolved matter, but it is easy to see how a commissioner acting in children's interests would need to have influence on it. The report continues:

> "We believe that such jurisdiction would be desirable to promote the rights and welfare of children in Wales."

In that connection, I draw attention to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset in Committee, where he argued that it was impossible to legislate on the basis that in investigating child abuse, the only officials with whom the commissioner would have contact were those from organisations that fell within the remit of the National Assembly for Wales. Clearly, people who abuse children may be working for or in contact with agencies other than those for which the National Assembly has responsibility. The measure is a practical one that genuinely represents the interests of children, which is what the commissioner is all about.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): On behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan) and myself, I congratulate the Government and thank them for accepting the amendment, for which we argued strongly in Committee and which, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said, was supported by the Opposition. Clearly, that continued in the other place as well.

I shall not rehearse all the arguments that were used. I am pleased that, in the context of devolution, the Government were sufficiently positive and flexible to give the commissioner the powers that a wide range of individuals and organisations considered necessary for his job to be carried out in a way that would support children's needs in Wales. I thank the Government for introducing the amendment, to allow the Bill to go forward in a more complete form.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I rise to question the Minister about a matter that concerns my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey), who cannot be present this morning. It relates to Lords amendment No. 4 and the additional power of consideration and representation.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) referred repeatedly to the welfare of children in Wales. We are concerned that a considerable number of Welsh youngsters aged between 16 and 18 are in prison or on remand, but not many are in centres in Wales. The lack of suitable prison and remand accommodation, combined with the fact that the commissioner cannot exercise any power in respect of Welsh youngsters on remand outside Wales, means that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the commissioner to represent their interests.

That is in marked contrast to the case of children who are unfortunate enough to be in hospital, for example. Health is a devolved matter, and the trusts and health authorities are accountable to the Assembly, so the children's commissioner can work to support their welfare. Can we have the Minister's assurance that the Government will do all that they can to facilitate the commissioner's access to children being detained outside Wales, and that they will consider how the commissioner might act as advocate on behalf of such children?

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate on a Bill relating to Wales as my last contribution as Member of Parliament for Caernarfon. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your kind words earlier, and I thank other colleagues for their kindness not only now, but over many years, and their forbearance when we may have expressed ourselves with greater enthusiasm than was considered appropriate.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): No, never.

Mr. Wigley: I am glad that I still trigger the occasional response from Scottish Members sitting for English seats.

I welcome the amendments, as I welcome the Bill. On the comments of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), I am under the impression that the amendments under discussion meet the very circumstances that she described, as they broaden the definition of the children who come within the purview of the Children's Commissioner for Wales—we dealt with that in amendment No. 1—and also, through the present group of amendments, broaden the responsibilities in the context of the Assembly and outside it. Taken together, I hope that they address the problem to which the hon. Lady drew attention. The Minister indicates his agreement with that, and no doubt he will comment when he winds up the debate. Those are important points. I imagine that that is why the Government considered it necessary to introduce the amendments.

It is significant that the Bill is the first one that was requested formally by the National Assembly for Wales. We do not yet have the power to pass primary legislation, so until we get such power, I hope that that will be a means of pursuing the legislative needs of Wales, particularly where circumstances are different, as, sadly, have been the circumstances that led to the need for a children's commissioner.

I am interested to hear that hon. Members representing English constituencies hope that those powers will be made available in other parts of the United Kingdom in due course. That is as it should be. If good ideas are progressed from the National Assembly for Wales that can be taken up elsewhere, all the better, as likewise, no doubt, the National Assembly will be looking for ideas that we can implement in Wales.

There is, however, one aspect that leaves me with a little uncertainty. It has been suggested to me by organisations dealing with and on behalf of children that the amendments may have knock-on effects on other parts of the Bill and possibly on the Care Standards Act 2000. There may need to be more consequential amendments in order to put into effect the changes that we are making today. That was pointed out to me last night.

If that is the case, how can small and perhaps technical amendments be introduced? That underlines the need for a fast track for Wales for fairly simple legislative changes to turn powers such as those in the Bill into reality. That is particularly necessary if we do not have in the National Assembly the full legislative power that we would like to have had. Perhaps the Minister will give a thought to that.

A further question arises in the context of the changes, as we consider powers to deal with circumstances outside Wales. I refer to the situation in the global world in which we live. Children may move from country to country, and a series of abuses may take place in different countries. Whereas we have a system for registering and identifying the people who may be guilty of abuse, we do not have a system to co-ordinate information about the abuse that may be suffered by an individual child, possibly carried out by different people and possibly in different countries. In the global world that we inhabit, we may have to consider that in a more international context, to make sure that such children are protected.

When I was elected in 1974, I did not know the meaning of the word "paedophile". That reflects some of the sad changes that have taken place over the years, or perhaps, more importantly, the fact that we now recognise unacceptable behaviour, which existed then but may have been swept under the carpet. The development of the office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and the powers that the House has given to the commissioner is a step in the right direction.

Much has changed since 1974 when I entered Parliament. When I made my maiden speech on 18 March 1974, looking forward to changes such as the establishment of the Welsh Development Agency and the need for answers to our social and cultural problems in Wales, I concluded with the comment that I hoped that I would see, even in that Parliament of 1974 to 1979, the establishment of a legislative assembly that could deliver policies for Wales such as that embodied by the Bill. Although we now have a National Assembly that can do much of the work, more still remains to be done. As I depart from the Chamber, it is my hope that I will have an opportunity to pursue those matters in another place, in Cardiff.

Mr. Forth: I wish the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) very well on his voluntary departure from this place to take up his work elsewhere.

I echo the theme suggested by the right hon. Gentleman. Yes, much has changed since 1974, not least the emergence into our body politic and our lives of commissioners. I am uneasy about that development, and I recently expressed that view in a different context in relation to another Bill. I am slightly reassured that, with this commissioner, we are using Wales as a test case. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), who hoped that the provision would be extended to England as soon as possible; I hope that it is not.

10 am

As I am uneasy about the amendments, I should like an assessment of how the commissioner works in Wales before we dream of extending the provision elsewhere. Having a liberal sprinkling of commissioners all over the place is a dubious idea; it remains to be seen whether it is beneficial. I am worried about the powers that we give commissioners and their apparent unaccountability and unelected nature. Our judiciary has centuries of tradition of independence although, at times, some of us get uneasy about even that. Now, however, we have a new breed of officials who are being given increasingly extensive powers—all in a good cause, of course, and always for the best. At our peril, we neglect the other side of the ledger: the possible dangers involved in the exercise of those powers. I am therefore uneasy about the amendment, which seeks to extend the powers even further before the experiment has even started.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My right hon. Friend looks and sounds sad, which, I am bound to say, is an unedifying spectacle for me and, indeed, the House. He has a naturally suspicious mind; is he inherently suspicious—I am not expressing such suspicion myself—of the concept of the commissioner? Or does he need to express a personal interest, as this is a case of frustrated ambition? Would he not be a magnificent commissioner exercising his functions with skill, wisdom and elan?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend tempts me, but the answer is no. Until I am much more satisfied with the viability and acceptability of the role, I would not want to be a candidate for it. However, I confess to being suspicious and become even more so when I hear the Minister and, regrettably, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), glorying, nay, wallowing in consensus.

Mrs. Browning: I remind my right hon. Friend that, in Committee, Conservative Members made sensible, practical proposals, which the Government have now accepted. I hope that he appreciates that consensus was not built in Committee; the Conservative party guided the Government along the route down which we are pleased they have now gone.

Mr. Forth: I am half reassured by that, as my hon. Friend is talking about effective opposition, in which I believe and which I wish was exercised more often. I take her reassurance at face value, but I have doubts about my party urging a commissioner on us. The good news is that I am reassured that effective opposition forced the Government to see what my hon. Friends obviously thought was sense. However, the not so good news is that it was not sense at all. We are therefore almost back where we started.

The matter is proceeding in a spirit of co-operation and is about to reach the statute book; there has been a measure of agreement. I accept that right hon. and hon. Members from Wales want such a provision; they think that it is needed and will be beneficial. As a Member representing an English constituency, I shall suspend my judgment. We must see how the commissioner works over, I hope, a lengthy period. We in England may decide that the post is a good idea but, equally, we may decide that it is not; that will depend very much on the way in which the commissioner, whoever he or she is, exercises the extensive powers that we are giving him or her, including the extension of powers in this group of amendments that we are now, apparently, about to approve.

I want to put down that marker or reservation, as we should not rush such things. If we are about to enter a new era of commissioners—if this is the new Britain in the 21st century and new millennium—and commissioners are the answer to all the problems that

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confront us, I, for one, am extremely uneasy. I want us to treat each case carefully on its merits and watch extremely closely the way in which the balance of powers and responsibilities is exercised. I worry about the lack of accountability and what, I suspect, are inadequate opportunities for scrutiny and holding commissioners to account. I hope that my hon. Friends and even the Government will keep those matters under consideration before we rush headlong into a world that will be dominated by commissioners, whose posts were set up for the best reasons but which may, in some cases, end in tears.

Mr. Hanson: Generally, hon. Members—even the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—have given a broad welcome to the amendments. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) made a valuable point about her backing and the strong support from children's charities in Wales and elsewhere for the amendments. I pay tribute to their efforts in promoting the measures that we are considering today. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) spoke strongly about those matters, and I welcome his support for the amendments.

Briefly, in response to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), the key point of Lords amendment No. 4 is to tackle the very issues that she raised on behalf of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey), who is retiring. It will empower the commissioner to consider any matter affecting the rights and welfare of children in Wales and make representations to the Assembly. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park rightly said, children in Wales will occasionally be sent to young offenders' institutions in England, but the commissioner will now be able to look at and monitor the performance of those institutions; he will also be able to make representations to the Assembly about whether it wishes to make representations to the Government about how they are impacting on children from Wales in those institutions. I hope that that answers her points; indeed, the amendment was introduced in response to those very concerns.

The right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) raised several issues. First, however, may I wish him and his wife Elinor well in retirement? I am acutely aware that, although he is retiring from the House of Commons, he will still be a Member of the National Assembly for Wales for the foreseeable future. I pay tribute to the work that he has done during his 27 years in the House; I acknowledge the efforts that he has made and the co-operation that we have achieved on some joint objectives. We have had differences, and will continue to do so, but he can be proud of things to which he has contributed during his time in the House.

As I am mentioning retiring Members, I should also mention my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands). He has not contributed to our debate but I know that he is proud to sit in the Chamber today for, possibly, the final time as a Member of Parliament. He has represented his constituency for 30 years, since 1971, and experienced the pain of defeat in 1970 in Cardiff, North, whose constituents he had served since 1966. I pay tribute to his work; I know that many Labour Members have welcomed his contributions, value his integrity and appreciate his work as a Minister; we are sorry to see him go. I make one prediction about the forthcoming election; Labour will hold Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

The right hon. Member for Caernarfon raised the question of international co-operation. He spoke about the possibility of children being abused in different countries and the difficulties that will arise. By virtue of this key amendment to the Bill, the commissioner will be able to consider any issue affecting children in Wales and make representations to the Assembly. If, for example, a child in Wales suffers abuse in another European country or, indeed, elsewhere in the world, the commissioner can make representations to the Assembly and, via that body, the Government about the way in which those rights and welfare issues can be tackled.

The Government recognise the need for international co-operation and co-ordination in identifying child abusers to reduce the risks to children in this country and abroad. We are working, for example, with an Interpol specialist group on crimes against children and with the United Kingdom National Crime Squad. There are also bilateral negotiations and initiatives involving UK agencies and other countries, both in Europe and elsewhere, to tackle the issues raised by the right hon. Gentleman. Much of that will be an informal network, but the Government certainly recognise those issues.

The right hon. Gentleman also mentioned that further technical amendments may be necessary as a result of the Lords amendments. I have looked into the matter and do not believe that they will. Obviously, we shall review the matter. If he wants in his last 48 or 60 hours as a Member of Parliament to write to me with details of his concerns, I shall certainly consider them and reflect on them in due course.

I welcome, as ever, the contribution of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst to the debate. I say to him what I said earlier: the Government will reflect on and consider the experiences in Wales. The Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), will be examining the matters, and the Government will reflect on them.

Mr. Bercow: Where is the Minister of State?

Mr. Hanson: I suspect that he is busy governing on behalf of the people of Britain. We speak for the Government as a whole.

Mr. Bercow: There was a reason for my inquiry. I very much hope that the Minister of State will not be doing that for many minutes because he is supposed to be replying to my Adjournment debate.

Mr. Hanson: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that it is possible to govern from Whitehall as well as from the House of Commons. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be here shortly to contribute to what might be quite a lengthy Adjournment debate if the business of the House is completed speedily.

I very much welcome the Bill. It is historic and ground-breaking legislation. As the right hon. Member for Caernarfon said, it is the first Bill produced in partnership between the National Assembly and the Government. I very much welcome and appreciate the spirit in which the House and, indeed, the other place have considered the amendments. We have a particularly strong working relationship with the children's charities. I pay tribute to the officials of the National Assembly and of the Wales Office. I wish Peter Clarke, who has recently been appointed the first Children's Commissioner for Wales, every success, and look forward to working with him during—dare I say it—the new Parliament.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 5 and 6 agreed to.

Armed Forces Bill (Programme) (No. 3)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Armed Forces Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 9th January and 2nd April:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Bill shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

2. (1) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

Armed Forces Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 31

EXTENSION OF JURISDICTION

Lords amendment: No. 1, leave out clause 31.

10.13 am

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2, 3 and 5 to 11.

Mr. Spellar: Despite the official form of words, the Government very much regret losing such useful measures. The amendments remove from the Bill the whole of part IV, which deals with Ministry of Defence police, and all other references that are relevant to part IV.

It is interesting to reflect that, only a few months ago, the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) told the House during the debate on the Queen's Speech on 11 December that he welcomed the proposals on the MOD police. As I recall, he did not single out any other part of the Bill for favourable treatment. That positive reaction came as no great surprise to us. After all, the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) had in April last year asked the Secretary of State for Defence:

> "if he will bring forward legislation to extend the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence Police to give them the same constabulary powers as the Home Office police".—[*Official Report*, 18 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 430W.]

We did not go that far, but in that light, I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome our proposals. Indeed, he continued in the same vein on Second Reading on 9 January, when moving a reasoned amendment that did not mention the MOD police.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Is the hon. Gentleman therefore intending, if the Government are fortunate enough to be re-elected, to reintroduce the measures?

Mr. Spellar: As always, we shall have to consider the availability of parliamentary time, as hon. Members know full well. That is why it is so unfortunate that the Opposition have behaved so disgracefully.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Before the Minister goes any further down that path, I should point out that it is not the Opposition who have contrived matters, but the Government who have conceded something in the other place. It is nonsense to rant about things that I said some years ago. Of course it is true that I wanted to extend the jurisdiction. We warned the Government that they were heading for trouble, but they would not listen and have had to climb down as a result. That is entirely the Minister's fault.

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman is disingenuous. Conservative Members in the other place blocked the

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measures at the instigation of Conservative Front Benchers in this House—despite what they have said to the MOD police and in the House and in Committee.

In moving the reasoned amendment, the hon. Gentleman said on the proposal to extend the jurisdiction of the MOD police:

> "We broadly welcome that, although we will want to examine in depth the interface between the MOD, Home Office and military police and how the proposals will affect those relationships."

That is quite right. He went on:

> "The alignment of the forces discipline procedures with those of Home Department police forces has taken a long time to achieve. We will need to ensure that the procedures will be satisfactory."—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2001; Vol. 360, c. 905.]

Rightly, the hon. Gentleman wanted to consider the matter. Indeed, a Select Committee deliberated on the Bill and produced a special report—which was agreed unanimously, without any amendment being moved by the Opposition, let alone defeated.

The Select Committee said of the proposals:

> "We believe that there is a case for giving MDP officers greater powers than that of a citizen when they are attempting to deal with emergency situations which they come across in fulfilling their normal duties."

That is absolutely right. It went on to say that

> "effective co-operation and co-ordination of activities between the MDP and local police forces is a matter fundamental to public confidence in policing. We welcome the Secretary of State's assurance that the revised Protocols, once agreed, will be published and made readily available to the general public."

That is a broad welcome.

The Select Committee also reported with approval that the witness for the Association of Chief Police Officers said that it

> "believed the legislation would improve the current position by providing clarity and transparency in what was currently 'a grey area'."

Let us move to deliberations in Standing Committee. Clauses 31 and 32 were agreed without a Division. Let us move to 2 April and proceedings on Report. The Opposition divided on clause 31, suddenly opposing it, but chose not to divide on clause 32. When the Bill reached the other end of the Palace, their lordships, at the instigation of Conservative Front Benchers, blocked both useful measures.

Let me describe what the measures aimed to achieve. They were modest adjustments to the jurisdiction of the MOD police in the light of experience since the Ministry of Defence Police Act 1987. In the professional assessment of MOD police themselves, gaps and other areas that needed to be improved had appeared. Far from being an agenda to expand the role of the force, the proposals were designed to enable it to operate effectively in meeting the demands placed on it.

The proposals were also designed to ensure that individual MDP officers were not placed in the impossible position, when faced with an emergency, of choosing between refusing to assist or acting in a way that might leave them at risk of legal challenge. Such situations are now more likely to arise than in 1987, because individual MDP officers are expected to move frequently between different defence establishments in order to discharge their responsibilities at those establishments. Indeed, as I said, the Select Committee noted that

> "there is a case for giving MDP officers greater powers than that of a citizen when they are attempting to deal with emergency situations".

The Lords amendments also propose that we lose clause 32 and, consequentially, schedule 5. Those provisions included important but completely uncontroversial proposals. As I have said throughout the Bill's passage, they would have made a significant difference to the administration of the Ministry of Defence police and enabled their disciplinary procedures to be brought into line with those of other police forces—which would, incidentally, have addressed the Opposition's apparent concern that ministerial involvement in the affairs of the Ministry of Defence police should be reduced. They would also have regularised the position of potential recruits who handle firearms during the assessment of their fitness for service and achieved the regime for statutory inspection of the Ministry of Defence police for which the Opposition pressed. Indeed, with the exception of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), they welcomed the relevant money resolution in the House, and we amended the Bill expressly to meet their concerns on that score.

On Third Reading, the hon. Member for Salisbury spoke about visiting the MDP headquarters at Weathersfield and went on to say some warm words about the Ministry of Defence police. He said:

> "I look forward to visiting Weathersfield."

He might want to leave a suitable interlude before doing so. He went on to say:

> "I have been invited and I shall certainly go, because I am convinced now that it is a mature police force and that its training is up to Home Office standard. Not only is it inspected by the Home Office constabularies, but it trains Home Office forces in a number of areas; we must dispel the myth. This is a criticism not of the police, but of the Government".—[*Official Report*, 2 April 2001; Vol. 366, c. 125.]

That is about playing party political games; it is not concern about effective policing.

The way in which the Opposition have behaved is an insult to the Ministry of Defence police and to their fine representatives in the Defence Police Federation. We will hear much from Conservatives in the next few weeks about law and order and their opposition to crime, but what do they do when a modest proposal is made in that regard? They block it in order to play political games. I am not sure whether that is due to the general election or whether the Opposition spokesman on defence, the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green, who is not present, is trying to bolster up his credentials for the only election in which Conservative Members are interested: that which will occur after the general election, when they choose a new Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Key: I invite the Minister to calm down. He is looking awfully red and flustered. Indeed, I cannot remember when I last heard so much bluster and fluster from a Minister. If he cannot handle his own business in the House better, I shudder to think what would happen if he were ever to manage a crisis. He has just presented us with the most withered fig leaf that I have seen a Minister use for some time, in an attempt to cover up his own inadequacy. It is astonishing that he believes that the Opposition can block a measure either in the other place or in this House. The Government still have an enormous majority—for the time being. I hope that he will consider these matters slightly more rationally. After all, he revealed that he does not know what is going on in Scotland in respect of the Scottish brigades. He seems also to be unaware of what is happening in his Department. I hope, therefore, that we can approach the debate a little more rationally.

We welcome the amendments. It is entirely the Government's fault that they have got themselves tied up in knots. For a start, they need not have opted to have an election now at all: it is a year early. The Prime Minister has cut and run, which has caused the problem. I was not privy to negotiations in the other place, but I know that Cross Benchers expressed serious concern. It must have been serious, if the Government were prepared to cave in so quickly there. They did not take the matter to the wire. They did not try very hard or even press for a Division. It is no good the Minister blustering; he failed to negotiate in the House of Lords and was not prepared to press the matter.

Let us get the record straight. The Ministry of Defence police have their proud origins back in the days of Samuel Pepys. They are a great security service. It was a Conservative Government who delivered the Ministry of Defence Police Act 1987, as a result of a careful and thorough report that was produced for the Ministry of Defence. The report was specific about the limits of the Ministry of Defence police. We have just spent some three months in Committee exploring the issue of jurisdiction. We were convinced that jurisdiction was being reasonably extended. We have no quarrel with that, but we voted in the final stages of the Bill's passage through this House against the clauses standing part of the Bill. I explained our reasons then and I do not want to repeat them now.

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman said that the Opposition voted against the clauses. Will he confirm that they voted against clause 31, but not clause 32?

Mr. Key: That is correct. We thought that it was important to make the point. We wanted to make it clear that we had reservations about the Bill. Our concern related not to jurisdiction, but to the way in which the provisions were introduced.

Mr. Spellar: In that case, why did the Opposition oppose clause 32 as well as clause 31 in the other place, at the hon. Gentleman's behest?

Mr. Key: I have already said that I was not privy to the negotiations in the other place, which is independent of this House. That is what the Government have never managed to understand. They do not realise that the House of Lords is independent; the Conservative party in the Lords does not take instructions from the House of Commons. *[Interruption.]* The Minister can snigger, but their attitude to the Lords symbolises everything that is wrong with this rotten Government and the way in which they have eroded the democracy of Parliament for the past four years.

For four years, this Labour Government knew that they could have introduced in a measured way the legislation that was necessary to increase the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence police, but they chose not to do so. In the end, they were bounced into it, and we heard about that only because of the incautious remarks that the out-going former chief constable of the Ministry of Defence police made in response to last autumn's fuel protests, when his service was caught without being able to provide proper police cover. That was the motive for tacking the clauses on to the Bill.

For four years, the Government could have done something sensible. They could have waited for the first of the quinquennial reviews, which has been under way since last October and with which the Ministry of Defence police have been fully engaged. They could have considered the review, done a proper job and then introduced a Bill. The fact is, however, that after four years they have failed to deliver. Ministers have let down more than 3,000 Ministry of Defence policemen and their families. Those people are doing a thoroughly professional job—that is not in question—but they have a different regime. They do not have the standard disciplinary procedures of the Home Office police force, but they should have, and that is what the Opposition have been asking for. We gave the Government the benefit of the doubt in the House of Commons, but the Lords said that they were not convinced.

It is important to stress that we are not opposed in principle to the extension of the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence police. The more that we scrutinised the clauses, however, the more that we realised that they were a stop-gap, piecemeal response to the fuel protests. We will undertake a review of the role of the Ministry of Defence police. Indeed, I might say that we will do so in government, in a few weeks' time.

I think that the Minister has overlooked the problem of disciplinary procedures, which remain without a statutory basis. He has also overlooked the concerns that have been expressed by hon. Members from all parties, including his own, about the problem of protocols between the Home Office police forces and the Ministry of Defence police. We were told by the Ministry of Defence that there would be standing arrangements at a high level that would be subject not to legislation or even to statutory instruments, but to deals made between the Ministry of Defence and Home Office police forces after the Bill was enacted.

We also raised severe and difficult issues about jurisdiction over civilians and about increasing investigation of serious crime by the Ministry of Defence police. I have no quarrel with that, as it is a natural evolution of the service that they provide. They have shown that they perform to the highest Home Office standards, which is why I accepted the invitation to go to Weathersfield. I think that the Minister might be surprised, as he seems to think that every Ministry of Defence policeman will suddenly be outraged that the Government backed down in the Lords. What will outrage the Ministry of Defence police is the fact that he has caved in and is now trying to shift the blame.

Above all, we raised serious issues about the accountability of the Ministry of Defence police and the transparency of their operations and their relationship with Ministers. We also asked about the independence or otherwise of a chief constable, who can be "instructed" by a Minister—the very word that the Minister used in the Chamber today in answer to a parliamentary question.

The aspect of the Bill that we are considering is a fiasco of the Government's making. We look forward to reverting to the matter as soon as possible. I can understand why the Minister is a little scratchy about it; he probably hoped to be back in his constituency campaigning by now. However, parliamentary democracy

[Mr. Key]

and proper scrutiny have been well served by their lordships' action yesterday. I do not know why the Minister and his colleagues in another place caved in, but that is what they did.

We shall support the Ministry of Defence police on the ground as we have always done. We look forward to the return of the subject that we have been considering.

10.30 am

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Before the debate, I was told that the Government had graciously agreed in another place to drop the relevant clauses. I therefore feel that I have wandered into a hornet's nest without much armour to protect me from the stings.

I agree with the comments of the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). The Government must accept that there are serious reservations about military police invasion, if I may use that word, of civilian territory. It is important to deal with the matter in much more detail, and at leisure, not in a great hurry at the end of a Parliament.

Some people cynically expressed the view that lack of civilian police has led the Government to believe that it might be helpful if the military police moved into their territory. The Government must therefore accept that there are genuine reservations about the provisions, calm down and reflect on them after the election.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3 agreed to.

Clause 37

ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Lords amendment: No. 4, in page 36, line 33, at end insert—

"( ) an order under section 8(2),"

Mr. Spellar: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

After considering the order-making powers in the Bill, the Delegated Powers and Deregulation Committee in another place recommended that the power in clause 8 should be subject to affirmative procedure. The relevant order-making power will allow the Secretary of State to prescribe the powers and duties of a judicial officer when undertaking a review of a commanding officer's decision to authorise a search without a warrant.

We are happy to accommodate the Select Committee's recommendation, and the amendment achieves that. I should like to place on record the Government's thanks to the Committee for its customary careful consideration.

Mr. Key: The amendment improves the Bill's accountability and transparency, and we welcome it.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 5 to 11 agreed to.

Social Security Contributions (Share Options) Bill (Programme) (No. 3)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Social Security Contributions (Share Options) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 23rd January and 8th February:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Bill shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

2. (1) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill shall be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(2) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Social Security Contributions (Share Options) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 3

SPECIAL PROVISION FOR ROLL-OVERS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 5, line 5, leave out "(assuming it to be exercisable at that time)"

10.33 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 2.

Mr. Timms: As hon. Members know, the Bill forms part of the Government's response to companies' legitimate anxieties about the effects of aligning income tax and national insurance treatment of employee share options. We debated the matter with great care during earlier stages of the Bill's passage.

In Committee in the House of Lords, the Government tabled a small number of amendments. Lords amendment No. 1 would clear up a possible misreading of the rules. We were worried about the rules for an option that had not vested by 7 November 2000 or was in a holding period that prevented its exercise. It might have been possible to argue that, because the option could not be exercised on that date, a nil charge should arise under the Bill. That was clearly not the Bill's intention, and the simplest way of clarifying the matter was to omit some words from clause 3 and add an overall provision to clause 5, which is the interpretation clause. That provision would apply to the whole measure.

I am grateful to the specialists outside the House who drew our attention to the possible difficulty. I am pleased that it was possible to agree the helpful amendment in another place.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): We support the amendment and the Bill, which are both remedial measures. I remind hon. Members that the Bill is a consequence of a Labour stealth tax on options and constitutes the third attempt to solve the resultant problems.

In April 1999, the Government introduced the employers' national insurance charge at 12.2 per cent. on the gains realised on the exercise of unapproved options. They were taken aback because many small businesses, especially new businesses, could have been landed with unknown, potentially damaging cash liabilities. The Government wisely responded to that and, in May 2000, introduced measures to enable companies to transfer their employers' NIC liability to the employee. However, there was a problem, because that created a 47.3 per cent. tax charge on exercising unapproved options. Again, the Government forgot the options that were issued between April 1999 and May 2000. The Bill therefore introduced a provision that limited the gain on which NIC was payable to the increase in value between exercise and 7 November last year.

As the Financial Secretary said, outside specialists have pored over the Bill usefully and in depth. It is not unfair to say that, initially, the Bill was not technically well drafted. I give the Government credit for accepting most of the key amendments that we tabled to increase the notice period to 92 days and remove the unnecessary provision to give notice when no NIC arose.

Clause 3 remained the controversial provision, which tackled the technically difficult territory of the roll-over of options in takeovers. In Committee, the Opposition stressed that the clauses were not satisfactorily drafted. On Report, we were not happy with the redrafts that the Government proposed. As the Financial Secretary said, the amendments are the result of substantial consultation with the relevant officials during the Bill's progress in another place, especially Lords amendment No. 1, which was designed to clarify a specific point. We support the amendments and the Bill, which has made the best of a bad job on which the Government should not have embarked.

The result is that we now have an extremely unattractive share option regime, particularly for small companies. The enterprise management incentive scheme is fine for small businesses worth up to £15 million, but for the important group of businesses valued up to £100 million unapproved option schemes have to be used. A scheme that charges 43.6 per cent. tax on gains realised is, as the Government's own small business expert said, punitive. It places companies in this country in a highly uncompetitive position, given the arrangements in the United States.

For that group of companies, the most appropriate share option scheme is the approved share option scheme, which is a capital gains tax regime. That is why the Conservative party is committed to increasing the limit per person from £30,000 to £100,000 for companies valued up to £100 million participating in the approved share option scheme. That is designed to solve the whole problem created by the imposition of NICs on approved options.

We are relieved that the Bill is to reach the statute book in the dying embers of this Parliament. It is remedial and helpful to British commerce.

Mr. Timms: I should like to respond to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), although I must say that I found his tone disappointingly churlish.

I remind the House that we are giving companies the chance to settle their national insurance liabilities on options granted in advance of the date when a gain is made by the employee. Companies that choose to take advantage of that will calculate the amount of national insurance due by reference to the accrued gain up to 7 November 2000—the date before the proposals were announced.

This measure effectively caps the national insurance contribution liability by reference to a company's share price on 7 November. The benefits to the company are that it will be able to remove the on-going provision for the liability on its balance sheet, thus achieving certainty, and save national insurance contribution costs in relation to any further upward movement of the share price.

I do not accept the criticism made by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs about the drafting of the Bill. The Bill has benefited from substantial consultation

[Mr. Timms]

with a wide range of people who follow these matters closely and I am pleased that we have been able to take on board their suggestions and proposals. We are a listening Government, as the Bill demonstrates clearly.

The question has been raised as to whether we have chosen an appropriate date—7 November 2000 was the day before the proposals were announced in the pre-Budget report. A date had to be chosen for crystallising the gains, and 7 November may turn out to be a favourable date for many of the companies using the measure.

It is not obvious how an optimal date could be found because it is impossible to predict how long the fall in high-technology share prices—a precipitative fall—will continue. Setting a later date could conceivably disadvantage many companies that have planned to use the measure based on the previously announced date of 7 November. Some 550 companies have already expressed an interest in taking advantage of this legislation and any change in the date would risk upsetting their business plans. Companies whose share price has risen since November 2000—there are some such companies—could lose out if the date were changed.

Another problem with moving the date forward is that it could disadvantage unquoted companies that have commenced plans to float subsequent to the 7 November date. Companies whose shares were not readily convertible assets on 7 November 2000 would have their liability on the gap options extinguished as a result of the Bill. They would have to reassess whether their shares were readily convertible assets on the new date and might find themselves having to pay special or class 1 contributions as a result.

10.45 am

Using the prospective date—that suggestion has certainly been made in our debates on this matter—would unfortunately give rise to national insurance avoidance opportunities. It would also leave companies little time to consider the effect of this measure on their national insurance liability.

Another possibility that has been considered is giving companies a choice of two dates. That would present serious problems, especially given the roll-over provisions in the Bill. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs has played a helpful role in this process and I am happy to put on the record my appreciation of the good deal of helpful comment that he has made on a number of the provisions. A moment ago, he drew attention to the complex character of the roll-over provisions. If we were to proceed with a choice of two dates, he could imagine, probably better than anyone else in the House, how complicated that would become. It is not an attractive proposal.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I do not want this to become an exchange purely between what might be described as roll-over anoraks. I am in the somewhat unfortunate position of not having the extensive knowledge of these matters with which the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) are blessed. I therefore wonder whether it would be in order, as well as being helpful to the House, if the Minister were either to dilate upon, or at any rate animadvert to, those roll-over provisions in some modest detail.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that generous invitation. What I can best do is refer him to clause 3, the character of which has already been referred to by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will see that the clause is called "Special provision for roll-overs" and there are three pages on the subject. If his perusal of the clause gives rise to any questions in his mind, I should be happy to address those. We looked at the clause in some detail in Committee and I am confident that it is now in good order and has benefited from the critical examination that it received.

Let me explain briefly to the hon. Gentleman what happens when an option that has been settled is subsequently rolled over. Where options were granted during the relevant period and rolled over after that, the settlement will relate only to the part of the gain on the new option that relates to the original. Provided that the options are rolled over at parity, the national insurance contribution will remain settled. Where a roll-over is not at parity, the amount of the gain on the new option relating to the amount in excess of parity at the time of the roll-over will be subject to class 1 national insurance contributions under the existing rules.

If the new option comprises additional shares that are in excess of the market value of the shares subject to the original option at the time of the roll-over, they will be liable to class 1 national insurance contributions on any gain arising on exercise of the additional shares.

Mr. Bercow: The Minister is doing his best to respond to the request that I put to him. As he knows, I do not lightly pay tribute to him, but I am bound to say that his explanation thus far has been comprehensive, racy and—dare I say it?—even intoxicating. I am concerned, as I know he is, about fiscal and fiduciary responsibility. I know that we are coming to an election, but he should bear it in mind that, when I am in Buckingham town centre on Saturday, my constituents will not be able to cope with a detailed explanation. However, they will ask about what he said on the exercise of fiduciary responsibility in relation to the amendment.

Mr. Timms: It is a shame that I shall be unable to listen in on those conversations on Saturday morning, but the hon. Gentleman should tell his constituents that all the actions of the Government have been marked by prudence. That is certainly the case in this connection. It will not assist the House if I proceed much further with our discussion, but I am pleased and grateful to the hon. Gentleman that we have been able to cover the matter in the way that we have.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs referred to the proposals in the Conservative manifesto. I say to him that the problem is that the sums simply do not add up, and that will become apparent in the days ahead.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 2 agreed to.

Clause 5

INTERPRETATION

Lords amendment: No. 3, in page 8, line 34, leave out "this section" and insert

"the provisions of this Act".

Mr. Timms: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

This second change, which is probably less racy than the first, will bring the Bill within the ambit of part I of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, which is the main social security legislation. Without the amendment, we would be unable to use the existing administrative procedures in the main Act to introduce the regulations to be made under the Bill. That problem was spotted by the Delegated Powers and Deregulation Committee of the other place, and I am grateful to it for that. I am glad to have the opportunity to put my thanks on record, and I am confident that the House will support the amendment.

Mr. Flight: I also support the amendment. Furthermore, I make it clear to the Minister that we support it and the Bill because they solve a problem, but, as I tried to make clear earlier, imposing additional stealth taxes on unapproved share options is a mistake.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that, when he talks to his small business people in the high street, he should point out that the issue is that unapproved options are no longer of any great use in giving people incentives and procuring good management from large companies that can afford to pay them more. People will not take lower pay and the chance of making unknown gains that depend on how the business performs if they have to pay 47.3 per cent. tax on those unknown gains. They will almost certainly stay in a safe job with the Government or a large company.

It is a great pity that a Government who put so much spin on wanting to support entrepreneurship and making this country achieve as well as the United States does should go down such a path. I am churlish not about the Bill, but about the cause of needing it in the first place.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Diabetes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

10.55 am

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): It is a pleasure and a privilege to introduce the last Adjournment debate of this Parliament, and it is a particular and unexpected pleasure to do so in the knowledge that the Minister for Public Health will reply to it. If memory serves me correctly, and I am woefully faulty in those matters, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are well aware, I first locked horns with the Minister on the BBC's "Any Questions?" on 21 November 1997. We have periodically jousted since, and it is a delight, albeit a surprise to her as well as to me, to see her in the House today.

The treatment of diabetes is a subject of the greatest importance, and interest in it in the House has been reflected since 1 May 1997 in six oral questions, 110 written questions, 14 early-day motions, three of which were tabled this Session, and no fewer than three Adjournment debates, each of was initiated by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders). They took place on 20 November 1997, 4 March 1998 and 30 November 1999.

In preparation for today's debate, I have received useful briefings from a number of individuals: the public affairs officer of Diabetes UK, Mr. Peter Bainbridge; the honorary secretary of the Aylesbury and district branch of Diabetes UK, Mr. Tony Ibotson; the marketing director of leading diabetes pharmaceutical operation Novo Nordisk, Mr. Adrian Haigh; and the House of Commons Library science and environment specialist on these matters, Dr. Alex Sleator.

What is diabetes? It occurs when there is an excess of glucose or sugar in the body, such that it cannot be used properly. People will probably be aware, and by the end of the debate they ought to know, that there are two main types of diabetes. The more severe version of the disease causes its victims to be dependent on regular supplies of insulin. That is called type 1 diabetes, from which approximately 20 per cent. of sufferers suffer. The other 80 per cent.—between 1 million and 1.2 million people—have been diagnosed as suffering from type 2, which is less serious, though still a worrying and painful affliction. Those individuals are not dependent on insulin and they can be treated by a combination of good diet, tablets and occasional provision of insulin.

We are discussing not only the 1.4 million people who have, as I advisedly said, been diagnosed as suffering from diabetes, but the large number of people—about 1 million—who suffer from the condition in ignorance of the fact. The Minister will know that, on average, people suffer from the disease for seven years before it is diagnosed, though it can be as many as 10 before diagnosis takes place. I shall come to the serious consequences of late diagnosis and, therefore, the corollary of it—the absence for several years of any treatment for the condition.

What causes diabetes? In truth, despite the many studies that have been conducted over a long period in this country and elsewhere, we do not know for certain what causes the condition. However, we do know that certain identifiable factors seem to provoke it. One is heredity. There is often a family history that can be regarded if not as a certain, but as a reliable predictor of someone getting this ghastly disease. A second factor is age. People over 40 are more likely to get it. Overweight—obesity, to give it its modern term—is also a significant cause of diabetes. In addition, we know from empirical evidence that there is, regrettably, a propensity to develop diabetes in the black and Asian communities. It is a truly horrifying fact that one in four Asians over the age of 60 suffer from the disease.

The symptoms of untreated diabetes are unpleasant. They range from extreme thirst to excessive tiredness to frequent urination to severe weight loss to genital itching and to blurred vision. The effects, as distinct from the symptoms, of untreated diabetes are even worse. To avoid doubt, and so that people realise the significance of the problem that we are confronting, let me spell those out. They are heart disease, kidney failure, amputation and, ultimately, blindness.

It is a not a common or garden disease to which we should not give much attention. People often imagine that it is not too serious. They think that it is regrettable and involves some inconvenience, but that it is not a big deal in overall medical terms. I want to emphasise that diabetes is a big deal. It is a big deal in terms of the number of people who suffer from one or other variant of it; it is a very big deal in terms of the costs to the national health service in its diagnosis and treatment; and it is a very big challenge for Governments and, indeed, all parliamentarians to do what they can to address the problem.

It is the significance of the disease that has propelled Diabetes UK to issue a challenge to Members of Parliament in all political parties to sign up to its pledge to recognise that diabetes is a serious disease, to appreciate the importance of early diagnosis—which is accomplished, not least, through early and comprehensive screening programmes—and to accept that each and every diabetes sufferer has a right to receive the best possible treatment available, irrespective of who he or she is, where that person comes from or what particular complications of the disease he or she experiences.

We are in possession of recent and valuable research, which is a result of work carried out in November 1999 by the Audit Commission. The findings were published in April 2000. The study makes salutary and alarming reading. It found that there were huge disparities—as much as fourfold—between the number of clinicians available in some parts of the country relative to others for the treatment of diabetes. The Audit Commission also found that there were substantial variations in the referral patterns in relation to the disease. There does not seem to be a consistency of practice between one area and another.

The quality of hospital care is variable. That is not because of a lack of will, but because of a significant disparity in the number of expert clinicians available to treat those suffering from the disease. There is also a problem at primary care level, where there is a major gulf between the expertise and understanding of some general practitioners and others.

So far as the sufferers are concerned, there are great differences in the level of education and understanding of the disease. Some people have a great understanding of it and know how best to minimise the symptoms and to improve their quality of life. Others, sadly, have not been well informed and are ill aware of what they can do to help themselves and how to seek expert and professional help from others.

We face a serious and growing problem. About 2.5 per cent. of the population suffer from diabetes. The threat—I do not want to be alarmist, but merely to interpret the facts available—is that that will increase in the coming years and 3 per cent. or more might suffer from one or other of the variants of the disease. That leads me, in the short time that I intend to detain the House, to highlight several challenges that I should like to put to the Government.

The Government are formulating a national service framework for the treatment of diabetes. I welcome that and am anxious, as I think everyone of good will in the House will be, to ensure that it best caters to those who suffer now, and offers the maximum hope of prevention and deterrence of the disease. I have three specific inquiries on the national service framework. The first relates to diabetic retinopathy. That phrase does not readily trip off my tongue because I am not expert in such matters. However, it is important that we do not allow complex medical terms to obscure the significance of the subject.

The strong body of opinion says that there should be regular screening for diabetic retinopathy on, for example, an annual basis, which is a modest suggestion. I am not entirely clear whether the Government have decided that that should be a headline objective and written commitment of the national service framework. The framework has yet to be published and I am not expecting the Minister to share all its details on the Floor of the House in advance of its publication, although debates are, regrettably, sometimes the best way to maintain a state secret. However, it would be helpful to hear about the kernel of the Government's thinking.

My second inquiry relates to the need to have a regular and comprehensive screening programme, which Diabetes UK also wants. That does not have to be of the whole population, because that would be superfluous and extortionately expensive, but of the groups that are most at risk. They are, indeed, known as the at-risk groups. Specialist opinion suggests that a regular screening programme could be invaluable in reducing the incidence of the disease. Do the Government intend to go ahead with such a programme? If they do, how is it to be implemented, what resources are to be made available and within what time scale will the objective be accomplished?

Thirdly, I should like to get a feel about how the Government envisage the balance will lie between the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the treatment of the disease. I mentioned the variable pattern of hospital provision—some good, some bad, some indifferent. Do they think that the volume of resources consumed in hospital care of sufferers should continue and be extended, or—as I suspect might be the case—are they thinking in terms of greater provision through general practitioner services? I shall be gentle, because I am always understated in such matters, but if the Government have the latter in mind, do they intend to put their money where their mouth is to extend training for general practitioners and provide specialist back-up services to complement the work of GPs in the localities?

Clearly, there will be cost and training implications. If we accept that the treatment of this disease will be multi-faceted, co-operation and co-ordination between the various sectors will be required. The treatment of diabetes is a complicated equation. No one suggests that it can all be dealt with in hospital or at general practitioner level. What is to be done about the shortage of specialist nurses, when is it to be done and how can we be reassured?

I want to refer to the guidelines produced by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on two drugs that have been recognised as having a potential benefit and palliative impact—pioglitazone and rosiglitazone. Those drugs are of some significance, because they have been given a nudge and a recommendation by NICE and because, to be effective, they require sufferers to have a considerable knowledge and understanding of the disease.

I am well aware that those drugs are not suitable for all sufferers. They will probably be of little use to the many sufferers who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of how best to minimise their burden. However, the medical experts suggest that if people know quite a lot about their condition—they may have suffered from it for a long time and have taken advice—those drugs can be of value to them.

It is only fair to note the great difference between the usage of those two drugs in this country and elsewhere. I am not making a partisan point, because that has been the position under successive Governments of both political persuasions. A tiny fraction of sufferers of type 2 diabetes use one or other of them. Perhaps we should be ashamed of our performance, or perhaps there are good reasons to explain the differential about which I shall shortly be enlightened by the Minister.

The lower usage of those drugs in this country than elsewhere provides food for thought. Do the Government intend to develop their take-up and use? If so, can we be sure that it is more than just an early pledge, as there will be a resource implication? Do the Government intend, in the very short time available to them before they make way for my hon. Friends and me to take over from them, to provide the resources consistent with adequate provision? I am sure that we are about to be enlightened by the hon. Lady, and that is an enticing prospect for me.

Funding is available through the Medical Research Council for important studies on the causes of diabetes, its incidence and the means by which it can be effectively controlled. In 1998-99, about £3.5 million was made available for that purpose, and in 1999-2000 the figure was about £6.5 million, which was a substantial increase. I do not cavil at that. Those resources would probably have been used to good effect, but I should like to be clear that a continuing value-for-money study is taking place. Are there benchmarks or yardsticks for future research? Is the availability of resources tied to an improvement in the findings of the MRC studies?

What can we expect in practical terms? We are all prone to talk about inputs. We are entirely justified in doing so, but what interests sufferers of this disease, as of others, and their families is not input, but output. What are the results? How are we improving? Are we detecting the disease earlier? Are we preventing it thereby? Are we treating it more effectively? Are we reducing its incidence? Can we hold out the prospect of a diabetes-free age, or at least of an age in which its incidence is dramatically reduced?

[Mr. John Bercow]

Finally, I should like to refer to insulin pumps. The usage of insulin pumps is also relatively low in this country—the figure is about 0.5 per cent.—by comparison with practice elsewhere. In Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States, usage by sufferers in the relevant category is 5 per cent. I am uncertain about what the Government have in mind.

In a consultation paper issued in July last year, Ministers said that it would be good if the expert reference group conducted research to see whether wider use of insulin pumps would be effective. Curiously, on 26 February this year, in a written answer to the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley), the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) said that no comprehensive evaluation of insulin pumps had taken place, and that no specific guidance had been issued. Is that the Government's final position, or do they intend to do something about it?

There is a need for a vision, for a series of practical steps and, by way of reassurance and encouragement to sufferers, for an indication of a time scale within which these important objectives will be accomplished. I look forward immensely to what the Minister has to say.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your indulgence. I want to pay tribute to the parliamentary and political giant of our times, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who is present for the final time in this Chamber. It is 51 years and three months since he was first elected to the House. I know that he does not want to be embarrassed by excessive effusions from his lifelong political enemies, but a modest dose of embarrassment does no harm to anyone's health, and what I say to him is sincerely meant. The term is much abused and much over-used in our political life, but he is genuinely a great man.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I was not expecting the hon. Gentleman's comments. There will be no report of his speech in the press. His speech could in no way be linked to the election campaign. It was a scholarly speech about a matter of great interest. The Minister will reply, and it will be a good debate. When people say that Parliament has lost the confidence of the people, it is in part because they do not know that conscientious Members raise important questions and receive proper replies. *Hansard* is the only newspaper that will record his speech, but I shall long remember it.

Mr. Bercow: That was typically gracious of the right hon. Gentleman. I agree with him about the central point. The longer one is in this place—I have been here only four years and 10 days—the more one appreciates that the vast majority of Members of Parliament on both sides of the House are honest, conscientious, decent and hard working. The activities of the recalcitrant minority tend to besmirch the good name of the majority. It would be fatal for democracy if the profession of politics, which is a perfectly noble calling, were ultimately to be brought into disrepute.

The right hon. Gentleman is the particular champion of principle in politics, but sitting below him is the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who has been a similarly principled, steadfast, dedicated and selfless representative of his constituents over a long period, and I wish him a long and enjoyable retirement.

There is no doubt in my mind that MPs have real opportunities to raise important issues on behalf of their constituents. This is one such opportunity. In concluding and in looking forward to the Minister's reply, I want to say that there is no greater privilege for any Briton than to be a Member of Parliament. Every day, when I come into the Palace of Westminster and take my seat in the Chamber—which, as you know, Mr. Speaker, I do with monotonous regularity—I have a glint in my eye, a spring in my step and a feeling of tremendous gratitude for what my constituents have given me the opportunity to do.

11.20 am

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) for his speech. Four years and 10 days it may have been, but during that time my hon. Friend has earned himself a reputation as the terrier of the Opposition. One factor in that, which he was able to prove today, is that he is a very serious politician who has learned his trade well. As the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) observed, the case that my hon. Friend presented needs to be publicised much more widely, but when we look up at the Press Gallery we see that not one member of the press is there. That is a great shame, and it was never the case when the right hon. Member for Chesterfield and I were first in the House.

I want to make two points about my hon. Friend's speech. The tragedy that can be generated by this illness is frequently misunderstood or, indeed, not known. Many Members will remember my colleague, Sir Peter Hordern. His son, whose condition was unknown to the family, suddenly suffered a loss of insulin and became unconscious. Still four years later, he needs 24-hour nursing. He cannot speak, and has very little control over himself. Given whose son he is, his background enabled him to be looked after earlier and, luckily, subsequently; but his condition is a terrifying indication of how ghastly the effects of the disease can be. That is why I wanted to underline what was said by my hon. Friend.

The second case I want to raise concerns an employee whose seven-year-old son suddenly fell ill during a school trip. Fortunately, he was quickly diagnosed as being diabetic, has since been stabilised and is now back at school, and even able to play games. If the disease is dealt with properly, it is possible to get on top of it. Nevertheless, I ask the Minister to pay particular attention to the need to provide more information about the treatment of very young diabetics: if a young child has to have injections from the age of six, seven or eight, for the rest of his or her life, it is a terrifying worry for the parents and a ghastly situation for the patient. I should like an assurance that the national health service pays particular attention to cases where diabetes hits youngsters.

Finally, let me pay tribute to tens of thousands of people in Poplar, where the Labour votes were weighed and only mine were counted. I also thank those in Lincoln, where I had my first contact with Lady Boothroyd, as she now is. She was then aide to the sitting Member, Geoffrey de Freitas. I pay tribute also to my erstwhile colleague—I describe him as a colleague, although we were on opposite sides of the House—"Mik"

Mikardo. I was able to defeat him in Reading in 1959, unfortunately for him but fortunately for me. He was then a vice-chairman of the Labour party, and when 1964 came around he would undoubtedly have been included in Mr. Wilson's Government. I defeated him, however, and he was out of Parliament for four years. Members on my side often made "reds under the bed" accusations about him, but most were massively exaggerated. He was a very solid Member of Parliament, and a very good constituency Member.

Lastly, I pay tribute to my constituents in Honiton and lovely East Devon, who have been kind enough to add 34 years to the seven during which I represented Reading. I am so lucky to have been given this opportunity. I thank not just those who voted for me, but many who, having not done so, have supported some of the work that I have done and tried to do in the House.

When people come here, they must remember that not everyone can become a Minister; only a limited number will do so. Members of Parliament have a vast job to do, in many different ways. As most Members know, I have concentrated largely on procedure. Since 1984 I have been associated with the effort to ensure that we can consider legislation more thoroughly, more simply and more properly. That aim has not yet been accomplished, but I pray that it may happen in the next Parliament.

The benefit that can be conferred by good Members of Parliament not seeking to be Ministers but doing their proper job in the House of Commons is very real. I am most grateful to have been given that opportunity: I am a very lucky man.

11.28 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I apologise to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), and to you, Mr. Speaker, for missing the opening of the debate. There is a general election campaign going on, and I am afraid that I got involved somewhere else. I know that the hon. Gentleman was looking forward to hearing from the Minister for Public Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), which he described as an enticing prospect. He is probably less enticed by the prospect of my response, but perhaps we can discuss that outside.

I echo the tribute paid to the hon. Gentleman by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). All of us who have had the privilege of sitting on the Labour Benches during this Parliament have become used to hearing the hon. Gentleman's lucid and assiduous explanations of his points. When he speaks about issues such as this, in the spirit in which he has spoken today, it is hard to find a word with which any Labour Member could disagree—although when he speaks about political issues, most of us tend to recoil. I know that he will not be offended by that.

Mr. Bercow: I am delighted. It is a compliment.

Mr. Hutton: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is delighted, and will understand the spirit in which the compliment was paid.

Before I respond to the points made in the hon. Gentleman's thoughtful and—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield said—scholarly speech, let me pay tribute to two of my colleagues who are present, and who are retiring at the election. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield has made an outstanding contribution to this country's politics for many years. He is committed, as we all are, to the cause of democratic socialism, and cares deeply about the health and well-being of the party that has given him—and all Labour Members—such a wonderful opportunity to speak up for the people and to defend the principles and values that we hold so dear.

The same is true in spades of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who is a fellow Cumbrian Member and who is held in the deepest respect throughout Cumbria for the work that he has done over 20 years in representing his constituency with fantastic skill and dedication. I think that I speak for all of us here today, certainly for all Labour Members, when I say that I find it hard to believe that those two outstanding individuals will not be with us in the new Parliament to support the work of, I hope, a radical and reforming Labour Government, whom I hope will be elected on 7 June. I extend my warmest best wishes to my hon. Friends for the future and look forward, as I am sure we all do, to hearing their continuing contribution to the political debate in our society.

I also pay tribute to the work of the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), who, as he reminded the House, was elected to this place in 1959—I was three years old at the time. One of the things that has always struck me about this place is the continuity between the generations, which speaks volumes not only for this place, but for the people who serve here. We get a bad press. Some of it is justified, but those of us who know about Parliament and the House of Commons would not want to call into question the right hon. Gentleman's commitment to this place and his service in the cause of parliamentary democracy. It is a distinguished record and I am happy to pay tribute to it.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The right hon. Gentleman keeps a very good wine cellar, too.

Mr. Hutton: I have no knowledge of that. Perhaps in the light of my comments, I might get to sample some in the near future.

Sir Peter Emery: I extend an invitation to the Minister now.

Mr. Hutton: Great—your place or mine?

I also pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman's wife, Lady Emery, with whom I have had dealings in my role as Minister with responsibility for social services, and who has done outstanding work with the International Social Service, which is a fantastic organisation. She has been a marvellous advocate and champion for what it does.

Having gone through the parliamentary pleasantries, which I am delighted to have had the opportunity to do, as the last Minister to speak in this Parliament, I turn to what the hon. Member for Buckingham said about the important subject of the treatment of diabetes. He referred to the diabetes pledge that was issued recently by Diabetes UK. It urged decision makers in this place and health care professionals to recognise the seriousness of diabetes as a

[Mr. Hutton]

growing health challenge, and we certainly do. Therefore, I assure the hon. Gentleman of the seriousness with which the Government take diabetes.

As the hon. Gentleman said, diabetes has a major impact on the lives of nearly 1.4 million of our fellow citizens, who have been diagnosed either with type 1, which is insulin dependent, or type 2, which is non-insulin dependent, diabetes. As he rightly said, the number of people with type 2 diabetes is forecast to increase significantly over the next decade, yet at the same time healthy eating, physical activity and weight management can prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes.

If not properly managed, diabetes can result in a range of long-term complications—cardiovascular disease, blindness, renal failure, lower limb problems leading to amputation and, in some cases, earlier death. As a consequence, it has a significant impact on the national health service: diabetes and its complications cost the NHS nearly £5 billion a year, or 10 per cent. of its overall expenditure.

As the hon. Gentleman observed, there is evidence of unacceptable variations in the standard of the diabetes service provided throughout the country. The Audit Commission study of diabetes recently demonstrated that. That report showed some areas of very good practice, with staff working across sectors to improve patient care, but those examples are not always widely shared throughout the NHS. I strongly believe that there is nothing wrong with the NHS that cannot be put right by what is best about the NHS. That particularly applies to some of the issues to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

It was the variations in the organisation and quality of service that prompted the Government to announce in 1999 the development of a new national service framework for diabetes in England. It is also worth highlighting that the Government have taken action in different spheres to help to improve the lives of people with diabetes. For example, we responded positively to a campaign by Diabetes UK by adding insulin pen needles and certain reusable insulin pens to the drug tariff last year, making them available for the first time on general practitioner prescription. On a different matter, following a review prompted by the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology inquiry into driving and diabetes, new arrangements came into effect last month for individual medical assessment of people with insulin-treated diabetes who apply for licences to drive small goods vehicles. The Government are willing to listen to the concerns of people with diabetes and, where we can, to act on them.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions about the national service framework for diabetes. I shall try to deal with the points that he made. The aims of the national service framework are to improve health outcomes for people with diabetes by raising the quality of services and reducing variations between them. In doing so, I expect it to deal with the issues highlighted in Diabetes UK's diabetes pledge.

The scope of the national service framework is broad and covers prevention, identification and management of diabetes and its complications, including rehabilitation and continuing care. The framework will set clear national standards that we shall expect to see implemented. It will also define new service models, put in place effective strategies to support implementation and delivery of the new standards, and establish performance measures against which progress within an agreed time scale will be measured and monitored.

As with previous national service frameworks, that for diabetes has been developed in close consultation with an expert advisory group that has brought together service users, patients, health care professionals and health service managers. As the hon. Gentleman must know, that group was chaired in an effective and distinguished way by Professor Mike Pringle, chair of the council at the Royal College of General Practitioners, and Peter Houghton, regional director of the eastern regional office of the NHS executive.

We have published information about and arising from the development of the national service framework for diabetes on the worldwide web. We expect to publish the framework itself later this year, for implementation throughout the NHS in 2002. In general terms, we are seeking to put the person with diabetes at the centre of the health care system. His or her needs must be paramount. It will be a model for how the NHS supports and cares for people who are disadvantaged in some way—in this case, as a consequence of chronic disease.

The national service framework for diabetes is an important plank of the Government's quality and modernisation agenda for the NHS. In 1997, shortly after taking office, we set out how we intended to set a clear structure that held those who deliver services to account. In the White Paper "The new NHS" and the policy document "A First Class Service", the Government introduced a range of measures that we hope will raise quality and standards and decrease unacceptable variations in service. Standards will be in the first instance set by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and by national service frameworks; delivered locally by means of clinical governance; underpinned by professional self-regulation and lifelong learning; and monitored by the new Commission for Health Improvement, the NHS performance assessment framework and the NHS patients survey.

For the first time in the history of the NHS, we are trying to set clear national standards to guarantee fair treatment wherever patients live—whether in the hon. Gentleman's constituency or in mine. For the first time, we are inspecting all parts of the health service to ensure that patients get the top-class service that they deserve.

The quality agenda, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman also places heavy emphasis on, is at the heart of the Government's strategy for modernising the NHS. The NHS plan takes the agenda further still, introducing further steps to improve both customer service and the safety of patient care. The plan sets out how we will develop the role of primary care through better facilities—the hon. Gentleman was concerned about the balance between secondary and primary care—more staff and more integrated and multi-disciplinary working. That will raise the standard of care for people with diabetes in the primary sector, easing the pressure on hospitals, so that they can concentrate on providing the necessary specialist care.

Diabetes UK's diabetes pledge refers to the importance of patient-centred care. Care dictated by the needs of the patient, not the system, will be at the core of the NHS plan. The Government therefore attach great importance to involving patients, carers and the wider public in decisions about health service policy and delivery. That is why we have made great efforts to ensure that we hear the voices of people with diabetes and of parents of children with diabetes—I know that that is a concern of the hon. Gentleman—in the development of the national service framework. There were, for example, two people with diabetes on the expert reference group, plus Paul Streets of Diabetes UK. Other people with diabetes were on the various topic area groups set up by the expert reference group. There were more than 40 people with diabetes among the 120 or so who attended a 24-hour workshop in October 2000 to focus on patient and care pathways. The National Centre for Social Research was commissioned to run user focus groups and to conduct in-depth interviews with people with diabetes.

We want individual patients to play a greater role in determining the care that the NHS provides. We believe that an NHS that works effectively with patients will deliver better results for individual patients and better health for the whole population.

The hon. Member for Buckingham may be interested to know that an example of that objective in action is provided by the Bradford health action zone programme, which is developing models for delivering diabetes care within primary care. The local community and health care professionals are working together to improve the diabetes care within the sector through the development of new care models. Bradford demonstrates how our determination to modernise the NHS and tackle inequalities can improve services.

Encouraging people with diabetes to play a full role in the management of their own condition will be a cornerstone of effective care. To do that, we have to help them develop the knowledge and skills to become partners in their own care. Diabetes is an excellent exemplar of the need for a partnership between patient and clinician. As I have suggested, that will be a key focus of the diabetes national service framework. It is also central to the work of the expert patients task force, which I expect to inspire a major expansion of patient-led self-management programmes across the NHS. Indeed, the NHS plan committed us to establishing a comprehensive expert patients programme. We shall deliver that commitment.

The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the particular prevalence of diabetes in south Asian, black African and black Caribbean people. The diabetes national service framework will therefore pay particular heed to the needs of those who are disproportionately affected by diabetes, including people from minority ethnic groups.

The hon. Gentleman also rightly stressed the importance of detecting diabetes as early as possible—an issue highlighted by Diabetes UK in its diabetes pledge and, indeed, in its missing million campaign. Whether or not there are as many as 1 million people in the UK with undiagnosed diabetes, as Diabetes UK estimates, early detection to enable early treatment is clearly important. That is why we asked the UK national screening committee to consider how that objective could most effectively be achieved and whether there was a case for introducing a targeted screening programme or more active case finding for type 2 diabetes. The evidence on screening for type 2 diabetes is not clear cut.

The national screening committee came back with proposals for a type 2 diabetes development project, which were approved by Ministers last month. The project will aim to assess the implications of targeted screening for those working in primary care and the practical issues in its delivery. It is being designed to dovetail with existing research projects on screening for type 2 diabetes and should ensure that we have a clear picture of whether screening is the most appropriate way of improving identification of the condition.

Once they are received, the national screening committee's conclusions will inform implementation of the diabetes national service framework, as, too, will its recommendations for a national screening programme for diabetic retinopathy, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned and which we published last November.

We know that, once diabetes has been diagnosed, tight control of blood pressure and blood glucose levels are of key importance in its management. The UK prospective diabetes study—UKPDS—found that the lives of people with type 2 diabetes can be saved by more frequent checks and better treatment to keep blood glucose and blood pressure levels as normal as possible.

The Department of Health and the NHS, with the Medical Research Council, Diabetes UK and other sponsors, have made a major investment over many years in the UKPDS. It is an example of the real, life-saving benefits that can come from investment in high-quality long-term research. The Government themselves make a significant contribution to diabetes research through both the Medical Research Council and NHS support for research and development.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the work of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. A whole raft of other work on diabetes feeds into the new quality agenda to which I referred earlier, including that of NICE. NICE will help to ensure that the NHS provides the best possible treatment with the available resources, to bring an end to the lottery of care in which some treatments are available in some areas but not in others. The hon. Gentleman and all other hon. Members are concerned about that issue.

NICE will be issuing clinical guidance on aspects of the management of type 2 diabetes this autumn, and developing clinical guidelines for type 1 diabetes for publication next year. In recent months, NICE has also appraised the effectiveness of two new diabetes drugs to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and published guidance on their use.

NICE has recently reviewed the evidence on the clinical and cost-effectiveness of the two drugs. Its guidance on both drugs was similar—that either can be considered as a possible alternative to insulin for patients with type 2 diabetes whose condition is not being satisfactorily controlled by diet and other tablets. Of course, they will also give doctors another tool in the armoury of treatments available to them. However, prescription for individual patients will still be a matter of individual clinical judgment. Nevertheless, given NICE's guidance, use of both drugs, which are new on the market, can be expected to increase in the future.

Earlier this week, the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham), announced consultation on the proposed next wave of appraisal topics to be referred to NICE. It includes three diabetes topics:

[Mr. Hutton]

insulin pump therapy, to which the hon. Member for Buckingham quite properly referred; insulin glargine; other long-acting insulin analogues; and patient education models for diabetes. We shall consider further diabetes issues for possible addition to NICE's future work programme.

The importance of giving the person with diabetes appropriate information, to which the hon. Gentleman quite properly referred, was one of the issues highlighted by the tragic death of a young woman with diabetes, on which the health service ombudsman issued a special report only last December. The ombudsman made specific recommendations to the general practitioner and the hospital involved. However, as the ombudsman suggested, there are wider lessons to be learned from that sad case about the diagnosis and treatment of diabetes which we are determined to learn. We shall seek to ensure that those lessons are taken on board in the diabetes national service framework.

Finally, I should like to highlight some of the dramatic improvements in health outcomes that research suggests we can expect once best practice becomes the norm. We aim to reduce deaths related to diabetes by one third, and to reduce the risks of coronary heart disease, strokes, kidney damage and serious deterioration of vision by at least one third. Diabetes is the biggest cause of blindness in people of working age. We should also be able to reduce amputations and ulcers significantly. We could also provide better co-ordinated patient and family focused services for children and young people making the transition to adult services.

Those are all major goals for the treatment of diabetes in the future. The diabetes national framework will, for the first time, give us the practical means of ensuring that those aspirations become a reality.

11.46 am

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): My hon. Friend the Minister has given a very substantial response to the debate, which was initiated by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). I do not think that I can usefully add to what he has said, other than to say that, over the years, I have had a number of constituents who, having come to me on those matters, will reflect on his comments.

May I also thank my hon. Friend for his very generous remarks? I realise that this is an Adjournment debate, and I think that I have some understanding of procedure, but I should like to go slightly wider than procedure may strictly allow and still remain in order. I should just like to say one or two words to the House before I disappear off into the sunset in my retirement.

Often in the past few days, like many of my hon. Friends who are retiring, I have had cause to reflect on why I sought election to the House of Commons. I first sought election to this place in 1974, in a general election, and tried again in a by-election, in 1976, which I lost. Subsequently, in 1979, I was elected.

My reason for seeking election to this place was based on a conversation that I had with my mother when I was in my late teens. She told me that, in this life, to make a real contribution to the way in which the world works, one has to engage in public service in some way. Many of us who were then in our teens and twenties, formulating our political views, chose the political route as a way of entering public service. Some of us went on to become Ministers or parliamentarians; others, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), became great and eminent parliamentarians.

Over the years, I have watched with great interest new generations of young people coming into the House. I have often set out to help them in their early days and given them my advice, because I had been given advice. I was given advice by one man—the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam)—who, although he subsequently defected to the Conservative party, was very good to me when I was elected. I was also given advice by the late Bob Cryer.

I have always remembered that. They helped me when I knew that many were not being helped, and I resolved that I would help others. I really think that that pays. Over the past few days, I have had a number of letters and many conversations with people who recalled times and occasions in their early political lives when I was able to give them some advice which they took and which proved useful to them. I hope that when the new crop of Members comes to the House after the election, there will be people who set aside time to help them, because it is rewarding for the giver and, in particular, for the receiver.

Over recent years, I have watched the developments in the Opposition with the new crop of young Conservative Members who, in many ways, reflect the approach that we took when we entered the House, which was to oppose the Government. To be frank, I have been quite impressed. The problem is that there are not enough of them engaged in the practice. It is strange that when I came here, some of the people who used to say to me, "Get on with it," were Conservatives. They said, "It is often easier for you, in the Opposition, to deal with issues that we find politically embarrassing." That is true.

We had a good crop of Members; we used to call them the "fighting 40". I remember that we used to come to the Chamber and hold the Government to ransom—we would run all night if we could, and we did so on memorable occasions.

The point is that opposition is an art, and one learned it and mastered procedure. We spent hours in the Chamber just learning. We looked forward to the procedural feasts when Members would get themselves in difficult procedural wrangles. I remember George Cunningham, who subsequently went to the SDP, and Alex Lyon as great parliamentarians. Such people were very good at teaching us how this place worked. There is no politics in that; it is about being a parliamentarian.

My plea, as I leave, is that more people recognise that being a great parliamentarian is more important in many ways than being a great Minister. Great parliamentarians, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield, will be remembered for generations, whereas Ministers may well be forgotten. I say that with no disrespect to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, because he will be remembered. He is my tip for the Cabinet in the next Parliament.

I want a whole career structure to be built up whereby Members choose a route when they are elected. They will decide whether they want to be held to account or whether they want to hold others to account. That is important. When we secure a Parliament with a career structure within which people can develop and within which Chairmen of Select Committees are paid, that will give Members an incentive to be part of the legislature and the House will benefit immeasurably.

I read what I regard as pap and drivel in the press about how my hon. Friends have formed part of a compliant Labour majority in the House. That is simply untrue. The quality of questioning by many of my hon. Friends over the past four years has been excellent. Many have been prepared to ask awkward questions of Ministers and to hold them to account, inside and outside the House. The problem is that the press are not prepared to face up to what is really going on. There is accountability, and all I would say is that it could be improved in future.

I have loved this place, as indeed have many of my hon. Friends, including those who are leaving and those who will remain, and I will love it more into the future. It has been a huge honour for me to be here. I am indebted to the people in my constituency who put me here, to my party and to all the friends whom I have made over all these years.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) wishes to make a point of order, but before he does so I have something to say. The Clerk advises me that is not normal for Back Benchers to rise after the Minister has spoken, and there is no precedent for the Speaker taking part in a debate, but I am going to do so today.

With a general election coming, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) could have applied for an Adjournment debate on a subject with more relevance to his constituency, which might have given him a political advantage, but he did not. He raised a matter that affects each and every one of us and our communities—the problem of diabetes. I hope that the tradition of the Adjournment debate, whereby a Minister can come here and give an account of his stewardship of any matter, always continues. The hon. Gentleman has done a good thing.

I look at our small gathering and I can say to everyone that I regard you all as friends. It is said that Speakers should not have any friends, but I say that they should have as many friends as possible, but no favourites.

I look at the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) and I remember that when I was on my first Select Committee he was very helpful. He showed me a generosity and a kindness that I realise is typical of him. On our first trip abroad—it is not fair to say which land we visited—we went to a factory. There was no proper roof; there was coal and charcoal on the floor; molten metal was being pushed on a trolley and, to keep it from spilling, rags and sand were being thrown on to it by labourers. I was a great man with a camera, and I said, "Peter, I'm going to take a photograph of this, put it in my election address and call it 'Thatcher's Britain'." I wish the right hon. Gentleman very well indeed. I know that we will see him again because he is going to do a lot of work for the retired Members.

I remember that the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) entered the House on the same day as me. We were very confused, and he decided that every day he would spend hours in the Chamber and learn procedure. I nipped off to the Tea Room, saying, "No, Dale, I don't want to do that", but he did it. Eventually, not only the younger Members but the older ones came to him to ask him about procedure. I take on board what he said about the fact that no new Member should come into the House and be thrown in at the deep end. They should be helped, and that is a tradition that I always upheld as a Member because I knew that some, but not all, of the senior Members did not bother with the new Members. They should give them every piece of advice possible. I will miss the hon. Gentleman.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) will recall mentioning to me that his dear wife Caroline had written a book about Keir Hardie. We in Glasgow always talk about the specific district we come from. I say that I came from the district of Anderson, and next door is the district of Partick, where Keir Hardie came from. I asked the right hon. Gentleman, "Please tell Caroline that she will find that Hardie spent some of his childhood years in Partick, where my mother and father had their first tenement flat—what we in Glasgow called a single end." The following day, a book arrived—the biography of Keir Hardie, signed by Caroline. It is now up in the Speaker's Study. I shall always treasure it. It was so nice that my conversation with the right hon. Gentleman in the Tea Room was carried home. I greatly appreciate that book, personally signed by the author.

I wish you all the best for the future. I say to those who are going out to participate in the election, I wish you all well.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hesitate to raise this point of order after so kindly and thoughtful a speech as yours. I rise to ask that the adjournment be delayed to enable the Government to answer for the inconsistency between statements made in the House on 14 May and 1 June 1998 and the action that they took a few days later, on 4 and 5 June, when, at the behest of the Hinduja brothers, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary met the Indian Prime Minister's special adviser.

At that time, India had just conducted nuclear tests and the Foreign Secretary said that India

> "should . . . pay for isolation within the international community."—[*Official Report*, 1 June 1998; Vol. 313, c. 21.]

The British Government cancelled visits by the Indian chiefs of staff and asked for a review by the European Commission of preferential trade treatment. We now know that, at the very time that the Foreign Secretary was making his statements to the House, arrangements were being made for the special adviser to the Indian Prime Minister to meet—

Mr. Speaker: Order. My answer is no. The hon. Gentleman cannot make a substantive case through a point of order, and the Foreign Secretary will not be making a statement. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—and this is a bit more important. Did you read *The Mirror* this morning? In it, there is a column by Paul Routledge in which he talks about saying goodbye to our right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and others, but because he did not do his homework—it is all about sloppy journalism these days, as you will know from all the points of order on the subject raised by Opposition Members—he got it wrong and said that I, too, would be retiring.

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

Well, I have news for *The Mirror* and Routledge: I shall be back here, in this place, on 13 June, when we shall have an election for the Speaker—although you might get nodded through, Mr. Speaker. To Paul Routledge and everybody else, I say, I shall be back here, fighting for redistribution of wealth from the City financiers to the poor and those whom my hon. Friends have represented over the years, and those in Glasgow—and Partick in particular—will benefit as well.

Mr. Speaker: I shall let the people of Partick know.

Mr. Tony Benn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not know whether we are waiting for a message from the Lords or whether we are ready to go, but is it in order to thank you? You have broken another precedent today by making a speech from the Chair. I tell all visitors that it is a characteristic of the Speaker that he never makes a speech, but you have changed that. You have been a marvellous Speaker—kind to us personally and good in the Chair. I, for one, bitterly resent the wholly unfounded criticisms that have been made. I shall watch from afar as you are re-elected within the month.

Mr. Speaker: I think that it was Harry Truman who said that if they were giving out compliments, he would be sure to be in the wrong queue.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Appropriation Act 2001
Finance Act 2001
Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001
Social Security Fraud Act 2001
Private Security Industry Act 2001
House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Act 2001
Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001
Health and Social Care Act 2001
Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001
International Criminal Court Act 2001
Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001
Armed Forces Act 2001
Social Security Contributions (Share Options) Act 2001

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past Twelve noon.

End of the Fourth Session (opened on 23 October 2000) of the Fifty-Second Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in the Fiftieth Year of the Reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 8 May 2001

[MRS. SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Light Aircraft Insurance and Regulation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Hill.*]

9.30 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the important subject of helicopter and light aircraft insurance and regulation. I look forward to hearing the reply of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, not least because all the information at my disposal has been put at his disposal, so that he can give an informed response. I shall be focusing on a particular tragic accident in Leicestershire just over three years ago, when a helicopter crashed killing all on board.

The case is important for three reasons. First, it highlights the hardship faced by the Linhart family in my constituency. Secondly, it shows severe shortcomings in the law and regulations concerning light aircraft and helicopter insurance, and pilot training. Thirdly, on the day when we all expect to hear when Parliament will be dissolved, it is as good a demonstration as any of how a Member works in Parliament to help those in tragic circumstances and puts forward ways in which to avoid similar incidents in future. I pay tribute to those who have been involved in the case during the past three years, in particular my long-serving private secretary, Mrs. Thurza Rowson, who has worked hard on the case, and Philippa Carling from the Library, who has also provided invaluable support.

On 19 April 1998, a Robinson 44 helicopter crashed into a hillside near the village of Gumley between Leicester and Market Harborough. The pilot, James Coulter, and his three passengers, sisters Katie and Helen Linhart, and Helen's husband, Andrew Byrne, were killed. Helen and Andrew's three young children were orphaned and are now being brought up by their grandparents, Michael and Mary Linhart who, sadly, are unable to attend today's debate. I feel strongly about the case. Michael and Mary Linhart have suffered a terrible tragedy, losing two daughters and a son-in-law, as has Rachael Linhart—the surviving sister—who lost two sisters.

The case has several wider implications. It has revealed a serious inadequacy in the insurance requirements for private pilots, helicopters and light aircraft. Three small children, one of whom suffers serious health problems, have been left without compensation and proper provision for their upbringing, welfare and education. Not one penny has been paid to these children for the loss of their parents. In fact, it has cost Michael Linhart, a 75-year-old pensioner, a considerable amount finally to establish the position.

The three children now receive a total of £68.60 a week between them. It is made of £32.40 guardian allowance and £36.20 child allowance. That cannot be right in a society where such emphasis is placed on the provision for all eventualities and for the victims of every type of misfortune. From my involvement in the case, I have found that anyone listening to an account of the accident and its consequences for the first time expresses considerable amazement and anxiety about the situation. I can think of almost no other circumstances in which the children would end up with no compensation.

Before discussing how I understand the insurance situation, I shall briefly outline the circumstances of the crash. We must understand what happened to consider the insurance implications. The crash occurred on 19 April 1998 in Leicestershire, but not in my constituency. The party in the helicopter was returning from an evening meal at a nearby hotel, and the conditions were dark. Within five minutes of take-off, the pilot became disorientated, and the helicopter crashed. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Region's air accidents investigation branch at Farnborough concluded that

> "at the time the pilot took off the weather was unsuitable for his proposed flight."

The report also pointed out that the pilot had ignored the manufacturer's operating handbook, because guidance note SN-26 states:

> "Be sure you never fly at night unless you have clear weather with unlimited or very high ceilings and plenty of celestial or ground lights for reference."

On that night, a front brought rain and a cloud base between 300 and 600 ft above ground level that made conditions unsuitable for flight. As the area is rural, the general lighting is sparse. Coulter, although a qualified pilot, had little night flying experience, and the helicopter was inadequately equipped for safe instrument flying—I see the Minister nodding.

The East Midlands police air support unit, which is based 9 km south of the accident site, was scrambled but the weather conditions were so bad that their take-off was precluded. As the accident report states, at the time that the pilot took off from the hotel, the weather was unsuitable for his proposed flight. The accident that followed was catastrophic, and all people on board were killed.

I turn to the specific aspect of pilot training. Although I shall focus on insurance, I know that Mr. Linhart, who is looking after the children, feels strongly about that subject. I agree with him that the case raises important questions about helicopter pilot training. According to the accident investigation into the case, the pilot had completed the night instrument training necessary for a night rating. The night rating was achieved with only five hours flying at night, and entitled the pilot to fly at night, although outside controlled air space he was to fly in accordance with instrument flight rules. The so-called night rating does not qualify a pilot to fly with instruments at night if appropriate weather conditions do not apply. In other words, the pilot is qualified to fly at night with the appropriate visibility, providing that the aircraft remains clear of cloud and in sight of the surface. The Robinson 44 helicopter in question had limited flying instrumentation.

[Mr. David Tredinnick]

A Civil Aviation Authority review of general aviation fatal accidents from 1985-94 commented that

> "usually, training for the Private Pilot's Licence takes place in good weather—and with the advent of more candidates training for the PPL overseas, the trend is likely to increase. The average PPL student has little if any exposure to adverse weather during training and, on obtaining his licence, is unlikely to understand how to assess weather conditions or be able to relate his own skills to a deteriorating weather situation".

The review recommended that training should be subjected to greater CAA oversight, particularly in matters of weather appreciation, calculation of safety altitude, flight planning and diversion techniques.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I apologise for not being here for the outset of my hon. Friend's remarks.

Increasingly, flying training organisations in this country are finding that their business is haemorrhaging, particularly to the United States. The US has virtually wall-to-wall blue skies, which is not the case here. Pilots who train in this country are subjected to bad weather; indeed, they train for bad weather, because otherwise they cannot get airborne.

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I enjoyed clear skies in America when I was 23 and had the opportunity to fly in a light aircraft from Boston to Los Angeles and from California to Colorado. I remember what a wonderful way of seeing America it was, and how many light aircraft were buzzing around in America. By way of analogy, one could say that when diving—I am a diver—in the Red sea or the West Indies, the conditions are clear. The Professional Association of Diving Instructors in America runs courses that are designed for fair weather. However, the British Sub-Aqua Club trains in different and difficult conditions. I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, may call me to order. We are not discussing diving today, although we could move on to sky diving. I do not want to make the debate flippant. We do not intend to spin out the debate—not that we ever do in the House of Commons.

My hon. Friend makes a good point. We are discussing the safety of passengers and how to protect them. I have always believed that the training afforded by British establishments generally, whether for the air or diving, to be among the best in the world. In this instance, however, insurance seems not to be right, and the aspects of training and the notification of qualifications are involved. These are key matters for the Minister to consider.

The issue is whether the pilot's qualifications are properly known and his insurance is properly advertised. In this case, the pilot took off in conditions that were unsuitable for his proposed flight. Other fatal accidents have resulted from rapidly changing conditions or circumstances that had no bearing on pilot judgment.

On the key issue of insurance, I am worried about what insurance cover is required and whether the pilot has been negligent. It is precisely when the insured is negligent that victims in the aircraft or on the ground require adequate liability cover. I have some connections with insurance, being a member of Lloyd's—an interest that I have registered in the Register of Members' Interests, although it has nothing to do with this constituency case—and some appreciation of insurance matters. I understand that most claims are made by passengers rather than as a result of surface damage or injury to persons on the ground, but rare claims must be covered.

In January, in another potential accident, a pilot heroically guided a faltering Piper Seneca away from a school at Shoreham, bringing it down without loss of life, although damaging property. At the same airfield yesterday, a small aircraft made a crash landing coming into Shoreham airport, on the beach at Lancing. No one was hurt, thanks to an observant bystander who cleared the beach. One wonders about the frequency of such accidents. All too often we read in the newspapers about aircraft getting into trouble. I am reminded of the accident that happened at the weekend in France, in which a pensioner and, from memory, his daughter, who was about 20, were killed in similar conditions. An aircraft—from memory, a helicopter—came down. I wonder what the insurance situation was in that case.

In the Linhart case in Leicestershire, the pilot, Coulter, seems to have been seriously irresponsible in many respects, and my constituents were the innocent victims. I understand that when the coroner announced the verdict of accidental death, those present at the inquiry gasped in astonishment.

Coulter had hired the helicopter from a local company, Heli Air Ltd., on a self-fly, hire-only basis. As such, he was neither allowed nor qualified to give instruction to others, yet it emerged during the coroner's inquiry that he had offered shares in the helicopter and had received more than £3,400 from various sources, including Mr. Andrew Byrne, who paid £3,400 in cash, which was receipted. In return, those who had paid received a part share in the aircraft or helicopter, as well as instruction from Coulter. Although it is accepted practice for pilots to take petrol money, that does not seem to be the case in this instance. Mr. Coulter, under the name Helitravel Ltd., advertised services of sales-hire-charter-pilot training through local leaflet drops. He was, therefore, flouting the rules, just as he went on to do at the controls of the helicopter when he took off at night in breach of regulations.

Apparently, Mr. Coulter held no personal insurance but was insured by the owners of Heli Air Ltd. for flight subject to all warranties, terms and conditions of policy, which are the normal terms of an insurance policy. However, because he flew the helicopter in conditions that were manifestly prohibited by the insurance agreement and the aircraft's manufacturers, the leading underwriters, Ace Global Markets, denied liability to indemnify Heli Air Ltd. in respect of the accident on two grounds: illegality and failure to comply with air navigation orders and manufacturer's instructions. The underwriters further stated that Mr. Coulter had taken the helicopter without permission, in direct contradiction to the sworn statement given to the coroner by Mr. Mark Greenway, who was in charge at Stoughton airdrome, that he had given permission for the flight that night. The underwriters refused to pay compensation to the relatives and, when liability was denied, Maxwell Marland and Associates of Wandsworth, the aviation loss adjusters, stated that they had no authority to let Mr. Linhart's solicitors see a copy of the insurance policy. Essentially, the underwriters, on behalf of the hire company, denied liability on the ground that the pilot had broken conditions of the insurance cover.

The weaknesses in the law appear to be as follows. Insurance should be a buffer to provide protection against human error, but liability in this case manifestly did not apply when error occurred. That seems ludicrous. In the three years before I was able to bring the case before the House of Commons, Mr. Linhart instructed Mr. Paul Balen of solicitors Freeth Cartwright of Nottingham to act on his behalf. Despite every effort, Mr. Balen was unsuccessful in obtaining compensation for the children. However, he had other important qualities and responsibilities.

Many passengers are carried by aircraft helicopters and balloons, almost certainly believing that they or their relatives are covered when, in fact, they are not. That will continue as long as there is no statutory requirement for operators or pilots to hold third-party insurance. That is the nub of the case that we are discussing. The requirements for light aircraft, including helicopters and balloons, are in stark contrast to those for car drivers, who must have third-party insurance under the Road Traffic Act 1988. Hon. Members will recall that extensive negotiations took place years ago between the insurance industry and the Government to ensure that third-party cover. I suggest that the Government need seriously to consider such provisions for the light aircraft industry.

There is no scheme similar to the Motor Insurers Bureau to deal with uninsured losses. Furthermore, no legal requirement exists for pilots to show their passengers and the company from which they hire aircraft evidence that they have insurance. In the case to which I am referring, it seems that everything was jolly; the parties involved were friends with a part-share in the helicopter. However, basic, fundamental issues were not addressed; insurance cover was not in place and no questions were asked. That brings us back to pilot regulations. Perhaps insurance certificates should be placed on the wall. After all, hon. Members must have an insurance certificate for liability insurance on the walls of their offices. I wonder whether that applies in the light aircraft industry. I look forward to the Minister's comments.

At present, there is no statutory requirement in the United Kingdom for aircraft insurance of any sort. That is astonishing but true. The Civil Aviation Act 1949 included provisions setting out a scheme for compulsory insurance for third-party liability. It included a limitation of liability provided that an appropriate insurance policy could be issued, and further restricted the right of the insurer to repudiate claims up to the specified limitation of liability. However, those provisions were never brought into force and were subsequently repealed by the Companies Act 1967, which changed the insurance terminology used in the 1949 Act.

In the United Kingdom, it is obligatory to obtain insurance only if an operator applies for an air transport licence. Such a licence is essentially required only by scheduled carriers and not by all public transport operators—taxi operators, for example. The law is deficient because it is full of holes and complexities that often preclude relatives or passengers from obtaining compensation. That is what happened in the Linhart family's case—for various reasons, the insurance companies involved have denied liability and there is no cover in place, which has had awful effects. As I said, the children receive only a tiny amount of money.

In developing the arguments on insurance, it would be remiss of me not to mention the Warsaw convention, which is a set of legal rules governing—among other things—the liability of carriers for death and personal injury of passengers. The rules were originally written with regard to international carriage by air. The Carriage by Air Act 1961 makes the Warsaw convention part of English law for international carriage by air. The Carriage by Air Act (Application of Provisions) Order 1967 applies a modified version of the convention to non-international carriage, which includes carriage entirely within the United Kingdom. Hon. Members must forgive me; this is technical, but it is important that we address such technicalities.

The Warsaw convention applies only to carriage of persons for reward and to gratuitous carriage performed by an air transport undertaking. Therefore, in order to qualify for the compensation levels fixed by the convention, the passenger must be a paying or a non-paying passenger who is flown by an air transport undertaking. Unfortunately, many flights are undertaken without charge by non-air transport undertakings. In my constituents' case, liability was denied on two fronts. First, if the pilot was carrying passengers for reward, he was in breach of the terms of hire for the helicopter. Secondly, if he was not carrying passengers for reward, he was not covered by the Warsaw convention—or the policy, which, in any event, would have been voided by his negligence.

There is no insurance or scheme to act as a back-up to protect victims. Some pilots have hire arrangements with air transport undertakings for the provision of light aircraft, balloons or helicopters and carry passengers without charge. When such pilots crash, causing injury or death, the passengers and their relatives are not protected by the Warsaw convention. The pilot could still be liable for negligence, if negligence were applicable, but is unlikely to be adequately insured or, as in the Linhart case, insured at all.

When the Warsaw convention does apply, the liability of the carrier is strict—without proof or fault. However, the carrier may be able to avoid liability by proving that it did everything possible to avoid the accident. The carrier may also be able to avoid liability if the pilot was negligent. However, an individual claimant cannot bring a claim against the carrier for negligence. We examined all such matters in the hope of finding a way for Mr. Linhart to claim insurance, but following a decision in the House of Lords on Sidhu *v.* British Airways in 1997, that type of claim is not available in the United Kingdom. Most standard aviation insurance policies covering convention liability exclude liability if the carrier—including the pilot—has not done everything reasonably practical to avoid the loss. Yet, many accidents are caused by error. However, a CAA official said that most responsible operators in the general aviation sector do have insurance, as was the case with Heli Air Ltd. I remind those present that liability was denied due to a breach of warranty

[Mr. Tredinnick]

stipulations, which must be adhered to, although warranties have been consistently criticised.

The 1979 Law Commission working paper noted that

> "the present law of warranties fails to strike a balance and...should therefore be changed."

The commission recommended two possible reforms. First:

> "The abolition of warranties and the substitution of a continuing duty to notify increases of the risk, together with a provision that in the event of a breach the insurer's liability to pay claims should be governed by the proportionality principle."

That is a mouthful, but that is what was said. Secondly, it recommended a

> "modified system of warranties: that is a system including provisions that a warranty should only be effective if it is material to the risk, and provisions limiting the right of the insurer to reject a claim for any loss when there has been any breach of a material warranty, where the breach is quite irrelevant to the loss."

Nothing came of the Law Commission recommendations.

Robin Allan, who is the deputy secretary and legal adviser of the CAA, was involved in the consultation set up by the Department of Transport for a possible general scheme within the UK for compulsory third-party insurance for all UK operators and pilots. In 1990, Mr. Allan delivered a speech to the Insurance Institute of London, entitled "Compulsory Third Party Insurance for Aircraft and its Implications for Insurers". The situation has not changed since he made that speech. Although he pointed out that it seems certain that the vast majority of aircraft are insured, as I mentioned, he said that it was less certain whether policies were sufficiently comprehensive and whether the amount of cover was adequate, and raised questions of what should be done in the event of uninsured risk, which is a central issue.

Mr. Allan suggested that the following four questions would need to be addressed if a compulsory scheme were considered:

> "What are the appropriate levels of cover? What is to be done if the amount of cover proves inadequate? What is to be done in the case of uninsured risks? What is the position where any insurance policy may be avoided or cancelled because of a breach of condition"—

that is exactly the situation in the Linhart case—

> "eg. a breach of a condition requiring compliance with the provisions of the Air Navigation Order?"

The starting point for the CAA's feasibility study was that the impossibility of a entirely comprehensive scheme should not necessarily rule out the imposition of some sort of compulsory scheme. I shall not go into the details of Mr. Allan's comprehensive assessment. I do not have the time to put forward proposals for what is a highly complex and technical aviation insurance matter, and it would not be desirable to do so. However, I am convinced that the issue can and should be considered again.

I have shown today that the concerns that I have raised in this debate have been considered in the past. Sadly, however, proposals have been shelved, possibly because it would be by no means easy to tackle such issues. Although I wholeheartedly support the avoidance of red tape, which may have been part of the thinking in the past—perhaps the inadequacies that I have highlighted today were not given sufficient airing previously—I have come to understand, following extensive investigation of Michael Linhart's case and the devastating impact on his family, that regulation and a positive response from the Government are necessary, albeit that the Government may not be in office much longer. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) will be sitting on a Conservative Government's Front Bench in a few weeks' time. However, the Minister has an opportunity to go out in glory and tell us his Department's considered proposals. Although I say that with a smile, I do not jest, as this is a serious subject.

I have argued that the law must be reviewed in respect of both helicopter insurance and pilot training. It is fundamentally wrong that effective third-party insurance, along the lines of motor car insurance, is not available for helicopters, light aircraft and balloons. A strong case also exists for reviewing helicopter pilot training and regulation to make rogue flights by rogue pilots less likely. I urge the Minister to agree closely to examine the present situation, which—almost beyond belief—has left three young children orphaned with just £68.60 a week between them and no legal remedy.

10.5 am

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am pleased to take part in the debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on securing it. As it happens, I was about to lodge a piece of paper with the Table Office two weeks ago to secure a debate on the wider issue of general aviation and not just insurance. However, today's debate ranges wider because my hon. Friend was clever enough to include the word "regulation" in its title. That enables us to debate more widely than his remarks about a tragic episode suggested.

I declare my interest as a life long aviator. I have held a pilot's licence since I was 17 and one of my claims is that I received three licences in four days: a licence to fly an aeroplane on 10 September when I was 17, a licence to drink on 12 September when I turned 18, and a licence to drive a motor car on 14 September. I will not embarrass myself by informing the Chamber of the year in which all those events took place.

I have a close personal interest in the debate. Only yesterday, as a treat for my chairman's father-in-law, whose birthday it was, I took him on a surprise flight from Blackbushe airport in my constituency. The last time that he flew was about 40 years ago in a Mosquito when he was in the Royal Air Force. I was not quite able to emulate the manoeuvres of a Mosquito, but had a good go within the safety parameters that the Chamber and the Minister would expect.

I want to address a few points arising from the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth, and some wider issues about which I have given the Minister's office notice. The Minister has been briefed and I thank those in his office for their courtesy in doing so.

My hon. Friend raised a tragic case. I put it to him, however, that it is exceptional. One rather crude adage states that sad cases make bad law. I would not want him to believe that I think that it is a sad case in the popular sense—it is a tragedy. However, I am not sure that we should extrapolate a huge raft of regulations from that specific incident to deal with it and prevent it from happening again. My hon. Friend rightly said that we are both members of a party that believes in the reduction of red tape. As an aviator, I have seen regulation after regulation piled on. We need to consider carefully how far we continue to pile them on—always, of course, in the interests of safety—before we finally throttle an industry in which Britain leads the world.

On insurance, my hon. Friend made a fair point: anyone taking to the skies should ensure that they are properly insured. However, that is not without its difficulties. Having led a hitherto fairly carefree existence, on getting married I faced up to the realities of life and my new responsibilities and, like others in my situation, took out various life assurance policies. However, I discovered that a loading was placed on my life assurance policy, in that any private flying that I did would invalidate it. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that that loading was dropped within a few years, and in recent times none of my life assurance policies has incurred such a loading as a result of my flying activities.

However, my hon. Friend will find that it is fairly common practice among insurers to provide exclusions for activities that they deem particularly dangerous, such as mountaineering. I am not sure whether diving falls into that category. [*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend indicates that it might well do so, and it is certainly true that private flying sometimes does. Different insurers take different views. Specialist aviation insurers recognise the associated risks, but because those risks are perceived as relatively low, the insurance market is lively. If the risks were intolerable, no one would insure private fliers, but the fact is that everyone can obtain insurance for their aircraft and their flying activities.

There is the ancillary point that passengers are also at risk. How many people who, on a glorious sunny day such as today, are invited by a friend or relative to fly to, say, Le Touquet for lunch, consider insurance cover before taking to the air? I suspect that most do not. Indeed, the very act of looking up one's insurance policy would probably inspire a nervous reaction. Despite the statistics quoted by my hon. Friend, flying in the United Kingdom is a relatively safe activity. There are some 60,000 private pilots in this country—of whom about 30,000 are active at any given time—and approximately 10,000 aircraft. Putting the accidents to which my hon. Friend referred in that context shows that flying is a relatively safe activity. Of course, the moment that one leaves terra firma, one is in a third dimension that brings added risks, but I believe that those risks are quantifiable.

Mr. Tredinnick: Is my hon. Friend saying that third-party insurance for motoring has not been a success? Surely it is possible to apply the same principle to the aviation sector without overburdening pilots with masses of regulation. I am not sure that I see a difference between motoring and aviation in that regard.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend makes a good point, but there is a fundamental difference between motoring and aviation. The motoring market consists of millions of policyholders, but the aviation market is very much smaller. I am told that the aviation industry cannot operate a scheme such as that run by the Motor Insurers Bureau because the levy required would be great and would bump up costs enormously. A huge levy is not necessary in the motor industry because the scale of the operation is much larger, and most of the millions of motorists in this country get through a given year without an accident. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend raises an important issue and it is right to consider ways of ensuring that the tragic circumstances that he has described are not repeated.

I return to the point that my hon. Friend made about weather, on which I intervened. It is important that flying training organisations in this country should flourish and that we should not export the business to Spain or to the United States of America because weather conditions in those countries are wholly different from those here. The Minister will recognise that my remarks are addressed largely to him.

If a person is to obtain a pilot's licence to qualify them to fly in this country, it seems less than sensible for all their training to take place in a climate where weather conditions are so favourable that, when they return to this country and are pitched into low cloud or fronts suddenly coming through, they will be completely at sea. Being subject to adverse weather is part of the experience of flying training in this country. People must make calculations.

I had to make a calculation yesterday morning. I got up at 7 o'clock, looked out of the window and saw that the cloud base around Farnborough was low. I headed off to Blackbushe airport and saw that the cloud was breaking. I checked the weather forecast from Avbrief—there is the commercial plug for avbrief.com, a very good company that provides private pilots with aviation briefing—and found out that at Farnborough there was a cloud base of broken cloud at 1,000 ft, which tallied with what I could see in the sky. The forecast was good, so I took off and found that the weather improved as the day went on.

Private pilots in the United Kingdom must make such calculations all the time. A pilot who learned in the United States or in Spain would probably not encounter any bad weather apart from looking out for the odd tornado here and there. Here, the only Tornado that one needs to look out for is one coming the other way, up a valley in the Lake district or in Wales, in which case, one hopes that it is a bit lower than oneself. That is one of Her Majesty's Tornados, rather than the Almighty's, and is not quite as potent, although a potent weapon nevertheless.

Every flying club operates proper insurance cover so that aeroplanes are hired with insurance. No one can fly solo who has not had a check during the previous 28 days. I belong to the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency flying club, which has its own aeroplane maintained by members of DERA. It has a self-imposed rule, whereby someone who has not flown for 56 days has to have a check. The activity is becoming ever more regulated, ever more draconian.

It is all very well talking about more regulation and about making aeroplanes safer. The ultimate safety is not to leave the ground, but I remind my hon. Friend and the Chamber that aerospace is the one area where the UK is not struggling to keep up. We are a world

[Mr. Howarth]

leader, with the United States, France and possibly Germany. We rank equally with the United States in terms of talent, although not in terms of size.

We should not kill the golden goose. We should not make it completely impossible for ambitious and inspired young people to learn to fly. That would kill the business. I believe that there are plenty of safeguards. Air traffic control services in this country are absolutely brilliant. Although human error accounts for virtually all accidents, air traffic control is there to help. If one gets into trouble, the first thing to do is to call it and ask for help. It is only too willing to help. It is not there to try to catch private pilots out, and I think that it does a first-class job.

The cost is increasingly becoming a deterrent. It costs £140 an hour to hire the most basic of aeroplanes. That is a huge amount of money, especially if one does a 35 or 40-hour course—my hon. Friend can do the mathematics as well as anyone else. It is not just a rich man's game. Many people who learn to fly are young boys and girls who do a newspaper round or work in Tesco at the weekend to try to earn the money to do so. The consequence of more regulation is that the cost is pushed up, so that people cannot afford to go flying and lack the necessary experience, which has an adverse impact on safety.

That brings me to my second point. We need a national private pilot's licence that is applicable to people who fly in the United Kingdom but do not wish to fly beyond it, as is mostly the case. Some choose to go abroad. It would not apply to me, for example, because I have flown in France and in Germany and have a JAR—joint aviation requirements—licence anyway. Eighteen months ago, I suggested to the Civil Aviation Authority that we should have a national private pilot's licence. It seems to be coming round to the view that it is a good idea, and has undertaken negotiations with the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), said in a letter to me the other day that he hopes that it will be effective from the beginning of next year. I welcome that prospect.

Private flying clubs are up against it. The lousy weather has meant that they have been unable to fly. Huge and onerous conditions have been imposed on them by the JAR flight crew licensing requirements. They now see the prospect of a national private pilot's licence, but it will not be effective until the beginning of next year. That means that people are standing off, saying, "I won't start a flying course until the new NPPL comes in." No flying hours that are carried out now will qualify for the NPPL, which is nonsensical. I take this opportunity to say publicly what I have said to the Under-Secretary: any flying that is undertaken as from 1 June should qualify for the NPPL. In his letter to me, he said that

> "training to the NPPL syllabus will not be permitted prior to its coming into effect, and no credit will be granted for flying hours acquired under any other training syllabuses."

That suggests that there will be a completely different syllabus for the NPPL, but I cannot think why that should be so.

I shall give some examples of the exercises that are carried out by private pilots in securing their licence. The first exercise is aircraft familiarisation, which I imagine would be common to both licences. The second is preparation for action for and action after flight, which I imagine would also be common. The next exercises are air experience, effective controls, taxiing, straight and level flight, climbing, descending, turning, slow flight, stalling, spin recovery at the incipient stage, spinning, take-off and climbing to a downwind position—I am halfway through the list already. I cannot imagine that those exercises will be in any way different under the NPPL. I urge the Minister to give the industry a lifeline by saying that from 1 June it will be perfectly lawful for any flying that is undertaken to count towards the NPPL, as long as the student makes it clear at the outset that that is the licence that he or she wishes to go for.

I recognise the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth. It may well be necessary to ensure that people are properly covered when they go flying. An element of caveat emptor is involved. Someone who is not a pilot and goes private flying should first check whether the pilot is insured and that they are not invalidating their own insurance cover. If a company hires an aeroplane to someone, it has a responsibility to ensure that that person is competent and has the necessary insurance cover. I should like to see common sense applied to those matters rather than further regulation.

All of us who are engaged in aviation in Britain know that the number one priority is safety, the number two priority is safety and the number three priority is safety. The Royal Air Force trained me, and I can assure my hon. Friend that safety is the number one interest of all of us engaged in aviation, because our lives are at risk.

10.26 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on securing the debate. He has set out the tragic events at Gumley in April 1998 and the frustrations and difficulties that followed for the Linhart family, which was tragically affected. He has opened up a range of issues that deserve serious consideration and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to them.

According to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), sad experiences make bad law. However, he has not made his case because the important issues raised by that tragic accident have wider repercussions. I hope that the Minister has listened carefully to the hon. Member for Bosworth and that he will have something positive to say at the end of the debate.

The debate has highlighted not only the horrific lack of regulation or control that started the chain of events, but, despite comparisons with car accidents, that there are many accidents that involve helicopters, light aircraft and microlights. Indeed, the relevant statistics were laid out at the beginning of the debate. The consequences for insurance or regulation will not necessarily be the same in each instance, but we cannot be complacent and ignore those issues; we must treat the matter seriously.

The hon. Member for Bosworth focused on training. He highlighted the adverse weather conditions on that night and questioned whether the pilot was properly experienced and should have decided to fly. He also raised issues from the accident investigation report about its recommendation that there should be additional Civil Aviation Authority oversight of that type of aircraft. It would be useful if the Minister can tell us what changes, if any, have been made as a consequence of that.

The main thrust of the argument has rightly and properly focused on insurance. In the Linhart's case, liability was denied and compensation removed because of the illegality of the operations undertaken by the pilot, which ignored whether air navigation orders were followed and whether manufacturer's directions were complied with. Shockingly, in all the inquiries that took place afterwards, relatives were unable to see the documents that were at the root of the insurance cover.

The hon. Member for Bosworth said that insurance should be a buffer to protect individuals in the event of error. However, it appears from the way in which current legislation is crafted that exclusion seems possible when error has occurred, which makes nonsense of that principle and makes that a fraught area to consider. The worrying aspect highlighted by the hon. Member for Bosworth is that many passengers may be uninsured, perhaps inadvertently, but perhaps, occasionally, with knowledge. Without a requirement for third-party insurance, that is likely to continue.

The hon. Member for Aldershot referred to the sense of ensuring, before flying, that insurance is in place and regulations are followed. That may be sensible and proper, but perhaps defies reality. How many of us check the insurance status of our driving companion when we accept a lift? The system includes checks and balances, and reviews by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the CAA of the issues may have suggested that belt-and-braces provisions existed. The Linhart case—I believe that there will be other, similar cases—illustrates that although logical protection seemed to be in place, a family suffered a tragedy for which there was no compensation available. Compensation cannot bring back those who have died and cannot hope to make up for the resulting difficulties and emotional traumas, but it would at least provide a future for the family and the young children who were affected.

The hon. Member for Bosworth said that the law must be changed. He made an eloquent case for that and I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us that something will be done.

10.32 am

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I shall be brief so that the Minister will have time to do justice to the subject. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on securing the debate and on the work that he and his staff have done in pursuing the issue. It is a serious issue because, as we have heard, when people get into an aircraft, many do not realise the difficulties that can arise for their friends and relatives if the aircraft crashes and they are killed. My hon. Friend set out the difficulties experienced by the family with three young children, and we should consider carefully how to improve the situation and ensure better insurance cover.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) made a balanced and sensible contribution, and it emerged from both contributions that it is necessary to make changes in the requirements for insurance. My hon. Friend also referred to the problems that pilots sometimes have in obtaining the most appropriate insurance. To move forward, we need a balanced approach in which passengers are covered and pilots are helped to obtain proper insurance cover.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth said, international flights are covered by the Warsaw convention, which allows compensation to be paid without passengers having to prove fault. That is critical, because it takes a while to investigate air crashes and if legal action is taken the process can continue for years. My hon. Friend's suggestion for third-party insurance was very reasonable. There is no statutory requirement in general aviation for operators or pilots to hold third-party insurance. That is a matter of concern and contrasts with the requirement for third-party insurance for car drivers under the Road Traffic Act 1988. The Motor Insurers Bureau scheme might be worth investigating. We are aware that the narrower market may make it more difficult to set that up, but it should be investigated.

My hon. Friend also referred to the difficulty of warranties and set out the Law Commission's comments on breach of warranty and the fact that suggestions have been made over the years to improve the situation, but, thus far, no one has taken it up. The matter was raised in a ten-minute Bill on the Floor of the House in 1993 by Anthony Coombs, the then Conservative Member of Parliament for Wyre Forest. He said that there were 11,000 small aircraft and expressed his worry about microlight aircraft not being covered by insurance, particularly were they to crash and cause damage to an individual or property. We must review the position and investigate the possibility of such a scheme, as that operated by the Motor Insurers Bureau.

Gliders are required to have third-party insurance. At present, hobby fliers and those with small aircraft who do not ply them for hire are not required to have insurance in respect of passenger liability or third parties. Such a position should be put right. Section 76 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 imposes on pilots and fliers an absolute liability to pay compensation to people who are injured and or when property is damaged as a result of their activities.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot said, unless pilots can receive adequate insurance and be confident that insurance companies will not use small print to get out of paying such insurance, they can end up being sued and lose their homes and businesses. Some years ago, the racing driver, Graham Hill, crashed when flying back his formula one team from the south of France. The resulting legal action wiped out his estate, so his widow and his son, Damon, virtually had to start from scratch because all the money earned from motor racing and sponsorship over the years had suddenly disappeared. Damon Hill has been successful in starting from scratch to becoming a top racing driver. There seems a great deal of sense in our looking not only into insurance matters to cover passengers, but giving private pilots greater protection who otherwise might face a lengthy legal battle that might eventually wipe them out.

[Mr. Robert Syms]

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot made some good points about training pilots in the United Kingdom, given our delightful weather and the difficulties that that creates. The only time that I have ever considered learning to fly was when I went to the Cranfield air show. While talking to a salesman of a light aircraft, I watched an aircraft take off after which time it stalled, crashed and killed two people. At that point, I decided to stick to less dangerous pursuits such as politics. The debate has been good and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. We should be examining ways in which to plug the gap and avoid some of the tragedies referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth.

10.38 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on securing this debate on such an important subject. He has carried out enormous research and he understandably feels strongly about it. I thank him and the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) for their courtesy in giving me notice of the key points that they wished to raise. The worry of the hon. Member for Bosworth certainly led me to study the report on the crash by the air accidents investigation branch. I am also grateful for the helpful interventions of the hon. Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore). I hope to deal with most of the questions that have been asked. Those that I do not deal with today, I shall follow up in writing.

I much regret the tragic circumstances that have prompted the debate. It has drawn attention to several important issues in relation to aviation insurance, compensation and the training of pilots. I welcome the opportunity to explain the Government's policy on such issues. I shall also say something about how that sector of the aviation industry is regulated. Helicopters and light aircraft that are flown for commercial purposes usually require the operator to have a licence issued in accordance with Council regulation 2407/92 and to be adequately insured. The Civil Aviation Authority stipulates the minimum level of insurance required for the purposes of holding an operating licence. For single-engined non-turbine aircraft and all non-turbine helicopters, the minimum amount of insurance required is £3 million, which includes an element relating to third-party risks. Obviously, the figure is higher for larger aircraft. However, for helicopters and light aircraft operated privately, for pleasure or some other purposes, no statutory insurance obligation exists.

That situation may seem anomalous to the hon. Member for Bosworth, and he has so argued, but there are good reasons why successive Governments have not seen fit to introduce a requirement for mandatory third-party insurance cover for private pilots.

First, no evidence exists that those seeking compensation for damage caused to people or property on the ground by helicopters and light aircraft are unable to recover the cost of their damages. The number of accidents involving third-party damage is, thankfully, low and, even when significant damage occurs, we are not aware of claims for compensation not being met.

Secondly, most helicopters and light aircraft are kept at airfields, where it is normally a condition of storage that adequate insurance cover is arranged. People who own and operate such craft, which are expensive items to purchase and maintain, are unlikely to be foolish enough not to ensure that their asset is adequately insured for all risks.

Thirdly, introducing a statutory insurance requirement for pilots would need to be administered and enforced, which would necessarily impose a cost on private pilots. Unless a strict enforcement regime were implemented, there would be no guarantee that those who fly without adequate insurance would comply with the law. Although car drivers are required to have third-party insurance, a significant minority of irresponsible people continue to drive without insurance.

I hope that it will be understood that, for those reasons, the Government do not intend to impose a requirement for insurance on private operators of helicopters or light aircraft. Even if such a requirement were imposed, there is no evidence that those affected by the—thankfully—low number of accidents would do any better than at present. If I have correctly understood the case to which the hon. Gentleman referred, the details would suggest that, even if the pilot had been insured, he would have invalidated the terms of his insurance by attempting to fly in the poor weather conditions that prevailed at the time of the accident. The accident that we have been discussing was a result not of error but an illegal act by the pilot in choosing to fly when conditions were unsuitable. He was insured by Heli Air, but he invalidated the insurance by his action. We may legislate on many things in Parliament, but we cannot prevent people from breaking the law.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The Minister makes a good point. However, do not ultimate decisions on whether to fly and, particularly, whether to land in adverse weather conditions, always remain with the commander of the aircraft? The pilot himself made the decision.

Mr. Hill: It certainly was his decision, and it is a matter of the pilot's judgment. However, I want to explain the conditions, which are clearly laid down in law, that may guide the pilot's judgment in those circumstances.

The only way for provision to be made for compensation to be paid when such uninsured losses occur would be for the industry to introduce a scheme similar to that established for road vehicles, by the Motor Insurers Bureau. The hon. Member for Bosworth mentioned that body, as did other hon. Members. However, it is doubtful whether such a scheme would be economically viable, given the relatively few private pilots compared with the millions of motorists. The hon. Member for Aldershot made that point. Furthermore, it would be necessary to introduce legislation requiring all pilots to be insured, thereby imposing a regulatory and financial burden on this sector of the industry. As there seems to be no compelling case to do that, successive Governments have been reluctant to regulate in an area in which, as far as possible, industry self-regulation is to be preferred. I might also add that private boat owners have no obligation to carry third-party insurance cover.

The hon. Member for Bosworth mentioned compensation. I shall explain the circumstances in which compensation is payable in the event of an accident. He mentioned the Warsaw convention, which was first adopted in 1929 but has since been amended several times. It sets out the basis on which victims or their relatives may request compensation from air carriers in the event of an accident.

Although the convention applies to international carriage by air, the UK has adopted the same basic provisions for the purposes of domestic flights. More recently, Community legislation has been introduced that has resulted in much better terms becoming available for air passengers. However, in both cases, the provisions apply only in relation to commercial operations, and exclude private flying. In such circumstances, no statutory right of compensation applies in the event of damages caused by the actions of private pilots.

I do not want to diminish the tragic circumstances surrounding the case that has been brought to our attention this morning, but such events are rare, and the incidents of victims or their relatives being unable to obtain compensation are few and far between. I am inclined to agree with the hon. Member for Aldershot: I am not sure that it is right to legislate to cater for virtually one-off events. Sad or hard cases make bad law.

On pilot training requirements, under the Civil Aviation Act 1982 and the Air Navigation Order 2000, the Civil Aviation Authority has responsibility for regulatory oversight of a wide range of aviation-related matters, including training standards, licensing and aircraft certification. The Government have consistently made it clear that they are not minded to interfere in the CAA's day-to-day regulatory functions.

Pilot training requirements for helicopters and aeroplanes are set out in the joint aviation requirements on flight crew licensing—JAR-FCL—which are issued by the Joint Aviation Authorities and implemented in the UK through the Air Navigation Order 2000. The requirements comply with internationally agreed minimum standards and are aimed at ensuring that the student pilot can fly safely and efficiently under visual flight rules, which generally exclude night and poor weather conditions.

The JAR-FCL syllabus covers theoretical and flight instruction, including supervised solo and cross-country flights. Typically, helicopters flown by private pilots are simple in design and are equipped and certified for flight only in good weather conditions. Even in the case of more sophisticated, better-equipped helicopters, pilots are still limited to flights in visual conditions unless they hold a full instrument rating.

The CAA has been worried about the high rate of small helicopter accidents caused by pilot disorientation following inadvertent entry into poor weather conditions. Since the accident, the CAA, supported by the UK helicopter industry, has introduced a range of measures to educate pilots about the risks of encountering poor weather unexpectedly, which is a particular danger at night, when bad weather is harder to detect until too late.

One of the measures introduced recently is the new private pilot licence (helicopter) qualification for night flight, which includes much more instrument flight instruction than formerly. Although the qualification does not permit a pilot to fly in other than good conditions, the additional instrument training provides him with a better chance of recovering safely should he inadvertently lose sight of the ground. However, the best way to reduce the risk of such accidents is to educate pilots better about the dangers of operating small, inherently unstable helicopters in anything other than good visual conditions.

If a pilot flies outside controlled airspace at night, he must fly in accordance with instrument flight rules, which require that the aircraft remains clear of cloud and in sight of the ground surface, unless the pilot holds an instrument rating and the helicopter is suitably equipped. Given the additional training necessary to obtain the new helicopter night qualification, the cost to an individual pilot has increased, but the previously high accident rate suggests that that is fully justified in the interest of flight safety.

The national private pilot's licence is intended to provide an alternative to the JAR-FCL private pilot's licence for pilots who wish to fly simple aircraft in good flying conditions within the UK. A major concern of the general aviation community about the implementation of JAR-FCL was the increased cost burden on pilots obtaining and maintaining the private pilot's licence. In particular, more stringent medical requirements mean that private pilots are now required to undergo an increased number of expensive medical examinations throughout their flying careers. The NPPL's training and medical requirements, although not as demanding as those of JAR-FCL, will be appropriate to the limitations placed on the exercise of the privileges of the licence, and will enable many hobby aviators to continue to fly safely in UK airspace.

The hon. Member for Aldershot raised the question whether there may not be many areas of flight training that are common to all syllabuses and that could be undertaken and credited against the NPPL syllabus. Presently, private pilots are free to commence training under JAR-FCL. If the NPPL subsequently came into effect and the pilot decided instead to train to that new syllabus, he could apply to the body responsible for administering NPPL to apply for credit to be given for common areas of training. However, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the NPPL proposals have yet to go to consultation. Therefore, it would be wrong for the Civil Aviation Authority to allow pilots to commence training, particularly on a non-JAR-FCL course, in the hope that the NPPL will come into effect in future.

Mr. Howarth: I cannot understand why there has been a huge fuss made about the differences. A part of the parliamentary answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East, that I meant to quote and did not, states:

> "As regards previously accumulated flying hours, the NPPL is envisaged as being a 'stand alone' licence, with no read across of equivalence to the Joint Aviation Requirements—Private Pilots Licence."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2001; Vol. 366, c. 500W.]

I accept that the Minister is not a pilot, but I say to the CAA through him that the syllabuses simply cannot be completely different. That is absurd. I hope that I have

[Mr. Howarth]

made my argument to the Minister so that he can tell his officials and the CAA that the matter is perceived as an absurdity.

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who makes his points in a forceful, through reasonable, manner. I appreciate that they are based on his own experience and expertise in these matters. Of course, officials and the CAA will carefully read the remarks made by all hon. Members. I am sure that the CAA will give genuine consideration to the points that the hon. Gentleman made effectively.

I shall clarify the regulatory controls that apply to non-commercial flying. As I mentioned, the CAA has ultimate responsibility for aviation-related regulatory matters. The authority has sought to achieve a reasonable balance between maintaining central regulatory control and the devolution of certain flying activities to approved sector bodies. However, there is no suggestion that the CAA should divest itself of its core safety responsibilities. Therefore, for instance, the development of the technical requirements for the proposed new national private pilot's licence is being carried out by representative bodies from the industry, but the CAA will retain responsibility for the auditing of quality and safety standards. "Devolvement of responsibilities" is a much-misunderstood phrase, and the CAA will continue to hold ultimate regulatory responsibility, but will devolve certain oversight activities to approved organisations to act on its behalf. Again, safety standards will be assured.

In conclusion, I thank the hon. Member for Bosworth for the opportunity he has afforded the Chamber to discuss these questions in some detail.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful to the Minister for giving me a cue to intervene because I wish to address one or two of the points that he made for further comment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) made the point that law should not be made on the basis of one bad—or, rather, exceptional—case. I gave the Minister a list of 120 fatal accidents. It would be instructive if his Department examined them, as that might lead it to decide that the matter encompasses more than just one exceptional case.

Reference has been made to new licences that are being introduced, such as new night licences and new standards. Does the Minister not think that there is a case for ensuring that pilots operate within the existing regulations? Greater emphasis should, perhaps, be laid on ensuring that they do not stray from the fold. That could be easily achieved.

Guidance for passengers should also be provided: perhaps it should be a statutory requirement that a leaflet should be given to them. It might be argued that an organisation similar to the Motor Insurers Bureau should not be set up because, although there are millions of passengers in cars, there are only a few pilots. However, there might be inexpensive ways of overcoming that problem to ensure that passengers and their dependants are aware of the horrendous risks that they might run when they fly, notwithstanding the expertise and good faith of most pilots.

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for discussing this tragic case in such a reasonable manner.

I have been informed that, during the past three years, there have been, on average, 190 accidents involving helicopters and light aircraft with a gross weight of less than 2,370 kg. Of every 100 accidents, fewer than eight were fatal. On average, two people were killed in each fatal accident.

With regard to third-party damage, during the past three years there have not been any reported injuries to people on the ground, and only 10 instances of damage to property.

I take on board the hon. Gentleman's point about the need for pilots to operate within the existing regulations, but it is important to remember that, on the night of the tragedy in Leicestershire, the police and Royal Air Force helicopters were grounded due to poor weather. On the whole, public agencies and private flyers operate within the regulations, but that was not the case on this tragic occasion. That reinforces the hon. Gentleman's point about the need for education, and I and the Government concur with that.

The Government are not complacent about these matters. The training requirements for helicopter pilots have been improved in the three years since the accident. I do not wish to minimise the tragic consequences of the accident, but there are few such incidents, and there is little, if anything, that Government can do when all means to cover uninsured losses prove to be ineffective.

War Veterans

10.58 am

Ms Ruth Kelly (Bolton, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence on taking over responsibility for war veterans, and I am delighted that he is present. The creation of such a post was consistently blocked by the previous Government. In 1993, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), who was Prime Minister at the time, said, in answer to a written question, that its creation was unnecessary and would merely add another administrative tier. It has taken the election of a Labour Government to recognise the need to designate a specific Minister to deal with the issues and concerns of war veterans. I applaud that decision.

Many issues are of concern to war veterans, ranging from the recognition for service in the Suez canal zone to compensation for ex-prisoners of war in Japan. The Government have taken those issues seriously and they are taking action in relation to them. Today, I shall examine two other issues of particular importance to the welfare of war veterans: homelessness and medical treatment for ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Those issues are not the concern of only one Government Department. Therefore, given his new responsibilities, they would best be dealt with by the Minister.

Partly as a direct result of the rough sleepers units, we have seen a real drive under this Government to eliminate homelessness, with earmarked funding for people on the streets, co-ordination between Departments and a clear target to reduce the number of rough sleepers by two thirds by 2002. In the past, Governments reverted to short-term solutions rather than dealing with the long-term needs of the homeless, which put us in the position which we are in today. To tackle homelessness successfully, we must have a broader policy approach that includes provision for follow-up advice and support. The rough sleepers report from the social exclusion unit acknowledges that. It states:

> "There is a central role for Government here, both in what we can achieve directly, and in what we can achieve through the work of others, especially local authorities. This is a crucial challenge for us all. We must ensure that those who have been in our care as children, as prisoners or as servicemen, are properly equipped for and supported towards independent living. Rising to this challenge must be a major component not only of our work to tackle rough sleeping, but also our efforts to deal with social exclusion more widely."

Ex-service personnel, especially single men, are vulnerable to becoming homeless, accounting for at least a quarter of the total number of homeless people in Britain. According to recent research by Crisis, that figure could be as high as a third. Crisis also found that, once on the streets, ex-service men stay homeless for longer. More than half of all homeless ex-service men are homeless for more than 10 years. Ex-service men are more likely than other groups to become homeless for complex reasons: some entered the Army after being in care, while others know little adult life outside the forces. The nature of life in the forces may not prepare them for life outside. In some cases, ex-service personnel suffer psychological damage as a result of serving in the forces, which affects their personal lives and well-being and indirectly affects family relationships—an issue to which I shall return later in my speech.

Another factor to emerge from the Crisis report is the pattern of homelessness among ex-service men that results from the difficulty of finding suitable accommodation on leaving the forces. More than 50 per cent. of homeless ex-service personnel initially moved into accommodation that they did not want and 60 per cent. stayed in their first accommodation for less than a year. Nearly 60 per cent. took five years to find a settled home, and nearly 40 per cent. had not had a home at all since leaving the forces.

Much work is currently being undertaken by the armed forces to resettle those leaving the services at risk of experiencing housing problems. Indeed, over the past two years, the situation has transformed dramatically. I congratulate the Minister and his colleagues at the Ministry of Defence on the progress that has been made. Four developments over the past five years are likely to have a positive impact on future homelessness: the reorganisation of resettlement services, including the establishment of the career transition partnership; the provision of improved employment and accommodation services; wider access to skills and qualifications that are recognised in civilian life; improved provision for medical discharge, especially access to full resettlement packages; and a smoother handover from military to civilian services, including housing and finance briefings, workshops, seminars, training and help with finding a job, which is now being routinely offered.

How can we build on that work? We must acknowledge that gaps in provision still remain and work to deal with them. For example, while resettlement support is provided for many, there is no such support for those who served for fewer than three years, unless they were medically discharged. Those people are especially vulnerable to becoming homeless. We must identify personnel who are at risk but have served fewer than three years—for example, those who have been administratively discharged but have recognisable problems—and begin to create a package of measures of support for that group. Resettlement services for those personnel might be delivered as a specialist project by ex-service welfare agencies in partnership with other voluntary sector agencies that have a track record in working with clients with similar difficulties.

I am aware that a working group of officials from the Ministry of Defence and the rough sleepers unit at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has been set up. A pilot project called the single persons accommodation centre for the ex-services—SPACES—has already been launched at Catterick garrison. It is run by the English Churches housing group and provides accommodation advice to service personnel who are about to be discharged from the armed forces. Has the Minister any plans to extend that model to other areas of the country?

Homeless and service charities will need to work closely with local authorities to meet the needs of ex-personnel who are already in civilian life. I welcome the proposal in the housing Green Paper to widen the definition of categories of people vulnerable to homelessness and applaud the Government's decision to add ex-service men to the priority need list so that

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they can be prioritised in local housing strategies. The measures introduced in the Homes Bill, which is being considered in the other place, will put an obligation on local authorities to implement strategies to deal with homelessness. That is a huge step forward. The emphasis on prevention as well as cure in that Bill is a step forward. Many ex-service men do not become homeless immediately on leaving the armed forces. The new emphasis should mean that local authorities would have correct support structures in place to address their problems before homelessness arises.

Although local authorities may prioritise vulnerable ex-service men in their housing strategies, defining vulnerability will be important. The housing Green Paper suggests that local authorities are to determine vulnerability on an individual basis. However, as many ex-service men spend years in accommodation before becoming homeless, housing departments would have to consider circumstances going back many years when reviewing an application under homelessness legislation. Length of time in the forces, for example, is not necessarily an indication of the degree of institutionalisation or housing need. We should also consider the needs of those who have served only a limited time but have nowhere to return to after discharge, because they were in care or have no family to return to, for example. People who have been discharged after court martial or time spent in military prison should also be considered carefully. Will the Minister tell us whether the definition of vulnerability could cover all ex-service personnel leaving the armed forces? Will any guidance to local authorities be laid before the House?

Many ex-service men who become homeless in London are not from London. Resources should be used to prevent that concentration of homelessness in the capital. Will the Minister tell us whether extra resources or attention could be given to local authorities that, on paper, have a small number of homeless people in their area, but have an Army base nearby, for example? There should be clarification, too, about which local authority is responsible for whom. For example, would it be the nearest authority to which the ex-service man was based, the authority he left when he joined the armed forces perhaps 10 or 20 years before, or the authority where his family was living?

I bring to the Minister's attention the valuable work undertaken by the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation, which has set up an ex-service resettlement project, partly funded by the rough sleepers unit, that specialises in assisting homeless ex-service men. The project addresses needs, secures accommodation and gives support in the vulnerable early stages of resettlement. Such knowledge and experience should not be overlooked when guidance is drawn up to include ex-service men in the priority need group and when local authorities develop their homeless strategies. Perhaps the project could act as an example of good practice for local authorities.

Two in five homeless ex-service personnel have alcohol problems, compared with one in four non-service homeless people. There is a clear need for outreach teams to work with ex-service men on the streets and in hostels to deal with alcohol dependency and to provide on-going support. Local authorities will have to work closely with homeless and ex-service charities to develop rehabilitation and resettlement programmes for those with substance abuse or mental health problems. The consultation and involvement of service charities such as the Royal British Legion and Combat Stress is vital, as they, rather than local authorities, are likely to be the first ports of call for many homeless ex-service men.

The rough sleepers unit recommended various initiatives to help homeless ex-service men. I am pleased that action has been taken on many of them, but continued monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure that resources are properly targeted. I note with concern that the main subject of inquiry to the special helpline set up for ex-service personnel with health, housing and other needs has been lost war medals—although that is very valuable.

I welcome the Government's recognition that the problem of homeless ex-service men needs to be addressed and I support the many measures already taken. However, given the characteristics of homeless ex-service men, more resources must be directed towards ensuring that contact is maintained between the Ministry of Defence and ex-service men. The hurdles that they face in reintegrating into civilian life can emerge years after they have left the armed forces.

Perhaps we should rethink the current system and institute a new one that is more like the system available to children leaving care, whereby a caseworker is assigned to each individual. A point of contact could then be established with vulnerable ex-service men leaving the MOD and with their families.

I turn to the availability of treatment for ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. That was brought to my attention by the families of two of my constituents, both of whom wish to remain anonymous. Both constituents were having difficulty in obtaining funding for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. Is it not a paradox that we recognise the role played and the work undertaken by the armed forces during conflicts through statements in the House, awarding service medals and erecting memorials, yet a large proportion of our homeless are from the armed forces, and ex-service men are being denied medical treatment for psychological damage caused while serving their country?

Ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder can commit suicide, slip into alcoholism or end up divorced or in prison. Some to whom I have talked believe that the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder in ex-service men has been exaggerated, but I disagree. My view seems to be backed by a paper published by the *British Medical Journal* in January 1999. The paper was based on the first 1,000 patients to attend the gulf veterans' medical assessment programme and reported that post-traumatic stress disorder was the most common psychiatric disorder found.

For years, post-traumatic stress disorder in ex-service men was hardly acknowledged and it has been taken seriously only during the past few years. Are we saying that those who served in the two great wars were immune to it? No. It was then termed shell shock, and sufferers who admitted to it were accused of cowardice and desertion and were in danger of execution. I am glad that we have at least moved on from that line of thought.

Many cases of ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder still go unnoticed, perhaps because of the dismissive reaction of the general public, the perception that the ex-soldier is to blame or the masculine culture associated with the armed forces. For the ex-service man suffering from the disorder, the problem is serious and has been overlooked for too long. It can have a major impact on ex-soldiers, their families and society as a whole.

I illustrate the problems associated with the illness by drawing to hon. Members' attention some incidents clearly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder that have been covered in the press. The *Evening Standard* contained an article on 17 January about the tragic death of Colleen Chudley, who was knifed in the chest several times by her estranged partner, a Gulf war veteran, while her two young children were in the house.

The incident had all the signs of a person suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, evidence for which was contained in an interview that the veteran gave to his local paper approximately six months before the incident. He was quoted as saying:

> "Until the Gulf War, I had never been in trouble."

He went on to say that, on returning from the Gulf,

> "I started to have problems. Suddenly I'd just had enough, I didn't want to see anyone, I couldn't face anyone, I felt depressed. I couldn't talk to anyone because I didn't know how I was feeling. It was the first time that I had felt like that."

He went absent without leave, but was caught and held in military custody for some time. That scenario was repeated several times until he was dismissed from the Army because, according to the Army, he was too violent to serve. No help or assistance was given to reintegrate him into civilian life. He also claimed that, because of the stress that he felt he was under, he suffered nightmares and could not hold down a job for any length of time. He turned to drink as a form of escapism.

The second case is more recent. Last month, an 80-year-old ex-Royal Artillery private who served during the second world war pleaded guilty to the charge of manslaughter on the ground of diminished responsibility. He was awoken by the sound of fireworks and had a flashback, thinking that he had returned to the battlefields of north Africa. When his 85-year-old neighbour appeared, he believed that the enemy was breaking in, so he stabbed her.

Those two tragic examples illustrate that post-traumatic stress disorder can ruin, and even end, a person's life, and we should do everything possible to stop such situations occurring again. Because those examples are extreme and involve the loss of life, they have caught the attention of the media. However, there are many other cases—involving domestic violence, family breakdown and crime—that can be attributed to post-traumatic stress disorder.

What help is available to ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder? The MOD has put in place measures aimed at preventing post-traumatic stress disorder, and treatment is available at the Duchess of Kent's hospital in Catterick. According to MOD figures, approximately 20 soldiers a year are discharged solely or mainly due to post-traumatic stress disorder. People may think that that is a small number and wonder what the fuss is about, but it is only the tip of the iceberg. The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder can occur days, weeks, months, or even years after the incident. They can occur on its anniversary, or on the anniversary of the end of the conflict in question.

As the second case to which I alluded shows, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder can also be prompted by an event that triggers a flashback. Perhaps that is one reason why the issue has not been given the attention that it merits. As Martin Collins said in his article on post-traumatic stress disorder, published in *The Guardian* in 1992:

> "For many soldiers, the war goes on long after the fighting stops: there is the struggle to cope with trauma."

According to the interim report of the ex-service resettlement project, many ex-service men are not diagnosed with mental health problems when they are discharged from the armed services, but suffer from such problems later in life. The report also states that mental health problems frequently come to light in assessments. Perhaps a culture persists in the armed forces that views admitting to post-traumatic stress disorder as a sign of weakness or inadequacy.

In any event, answers to my parliamentary questions have shown that, on leaving the armed forces, a soldier is regarded as a civilian. Any medical issue is therefore the responsibility not of the Ministry of Defence but of the national health service. Given the new role of my hon. Friend the Minister, I anticipate that he will be able to communicate with the Department of Health and other Departments when an issue of concern to war veterans is raised. I should be grateful if he clarified that point, and told us to which Department such questions and inquiries should be addressed.

As I have said, the majority of cases of post-traumatic stress disorder are dealt with after the soldier has been discharged. As the Minister will know, there are two main sources from which help can be sought: Combat Stress and the national health service. Such provision might appear adequate, but in practice it seems not to be working and I shall try to explain why. I should begin by putting on the record my full support and admiration for the work undertaken by Combat Stress, which provides a valuable service that has benefited many ex-service men. However, there are a number of ex-service men whose condition is so severe that Combat Stress is unable to provide the necessary treatment.

Combat Stress funds treatment through the War Pensions Agency. Such treatment is available for a maximum of six weeks a year only, which raises a further issue. In order to be treated by Combat Stress, ex-service men must be in receipt of a war pension, but evidence suggests that those in need of help, such as homeless ex-service men, do not receive one. In the first instance, they must therefore apply for a war pension, which can take months.

Another problem is that many patients who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder require specialist treatment, but Combat Stress does not have the required facilities. As a result, I understand that it is necessarily selective about the patients that it accepts. For example, it has a low-alcohol policy and, on occasions, it has had to ask patients to leave. Such practices are in place because treatment is provided in nursing homes that do not have facilities for disruptive patients, who would be better suited to hospital treatment.

[Ms Ruth Kelly]

Based on the evidence and examples that I have mentioned, ex-service men who have become homeless, experienced family breakdown or been in prison have a common characteristic—an alcohol problem—which may divert attention from the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Consequently, many of those ex-service men—the ones who people see sleeping rough or read about in newspapers—are unable to get treatment from Combat Stress. In a nutshell, ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder who are disruptive or have an alcohol problem have no alternative to NHS treatment, which is where the problem lies.

Given the specialist facilities required to treat patients with post-traumatic stress disorder, the level of services available differs throughout the country. In fact, many hospitals do not have the specialist facilities required. In that case, NHS funding can be provided, so that the patient can be treated by an organisation that offers specialist treatment. That structure of access means that individual health authorities determine each application, which results in an inequality of access to post-traumatic stress disorder treatment. However, that was not the reply I was given by the Secretary of State for Health last November. When I asked about waiting times for ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, he told me in a letter that the information was not held centrally. However, he stated that

> "in primary care, people with post-traumatic stress disorder have difficulties in accessing specialist mental services through their general practitioners partly because of poor knowledge and awareness of the criteria for assessment and onward referral."

He continued:

> "We are aware of concerns about waiting lists within the National Health Service, but that there is no evidence that ex-service personnel are especially disadvantaged: they are equally entitled to receive care and treatment."

The problem is purported to lie at general practitioner level, but when I investigated I found that that is not always the case. I established that it is the health authority that has been refusing to give funding for specialist treatment, despite general practitioners agreeing the need for it.

When my office spoke to a representative from Planning and Healthcare Consultants, an organisation that offers specialist treatment for ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, it was informed that health authorities were refusing to fund applications for treatment. That impasse resulted in endless negotiations with the health authority in seeking funding, a problem that affected my two constituents. If a general practitioner states that specialist treatment is required, why would a health authority refuse to fund it? Is it the case that health authorities do not want to fund the treatment because of its cost? If so, it is unacceptable. The problem is not caused by general practitioners' lack of awareness of post-traumatic stress disorder; it is mainly due to health authorities' refusal to provide the necessary funding.

A possible solution to ensure that ex-service men have access to the necessary treatment would be to authorise a central body—perhaps the War Pensions Agency as it already allocates funding for treatment to Combat Stress—to access applications, monitor value for money, ensure a high standard of treatment and allocate funding to specialist treatment centres for sufferers of post-traumatic stress disorder. That would ensure uniformity of access throughout the country and ensure that all ex-service men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder had access to treatment. I would be grateful if the Minister considered that suggestion.

The lack of statistics is a key problem when examining issues that are relevant to war veterans. Over the past few months, I have been trying to gain a picture of the profiles of ex-service personnel who become homeless and are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Not only are there few statistics to examine, but there does not appear to be a plan to collect figures in crucial areas such as ex-service personnel who commit criminal offences. Perhaps the Minister would examine the issue of statistics with his colleagues at the Home Office and the DETR. Collating statistics on what happens to ex-service men when they leave the armed forces could help to ensure that their needs are addressed more effectively.

Society has an obligation to recognise and care about the needs of those who have served in the armed forces. I am glad to say that the Government have acknowledged that through the Minister's recently added responsibilities. We pay for our armed forces to train and to serve their country. It is right that we should also ensure the welfare of all our war veterans. They may have left the armed forces, but their experiences will never leave them.

11.24 am

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): This is the first time that I have had the pleasure of contributing to a debate under your chairmanship, Mr. Amess. It is nearly 25 years since we first encountered one another in the dark recesses of the London borough of Newham, and we may now be in the last few days of the present Parliament.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) on securing the debate and on her thoughtful and compassionate speech. She touched on the serious problem of post-traumatic stress disorder, which afflicts people who are paying the price of their past war service. I want to discuss what happens to those people and their dependants once they have retired. The Officers Pensions Society campaigns not only for the pensions of retired officers, but for those of their widows after they have passed away. For many years, the society has drawn attention to several anomalies that affect situations relating to such pensions. I shall refer to three of those anomalies.

My first example concerns post-retirement marriages, whereby service men marry after they have retired from the fighting arm in which they served. Widows of service men who retired before 1978, but who married them subsequently, receive no pension whatsoever. If their late husband retired after 1978, but they married him only after that retirement, they receive a service widows pension only for the years since 1978. The service man will be considered to have made the same contribution throughout the period of his service as that of a fellow service man who happened to be married during that time, yet, whereas the widow of the latter will get the benefit of a service pension, the widow of the former will not. That is unjust.

The second concern raised by the society relates to service men who retired before 1973 and who were not given the option to buy in their earlier service for the half-rate widows pensions. That means that their eventual widows—widows who were married to their late husbands during the period of his service—get only the one-third rate. The widow of the man who retired in March 1973 is condemned to a third-rate widows pension for life, whereas the man who retired in April 1973 after making exactly the same contribution is given the option to buy in earlier service for the half rate for his wife for the time she outlives him.

Thirdly, there has recently been a surge of publicity relating to the very different pensions that service men receive on an arbitrary basis according to the situation that obtained on the date on which they retired. It seems monumentally unjust that service men should have such differential pension entitlements according to an arbitrary date. To give an example cited by the society, a major who retired in 1977 receives £4,269 per annum less than an exactly comparable major who retired two years earlier in 1975. In fact, he receives less than all those who retired right back to 1964.

When he sums up, I hope that the Minister will make every attempt to deal with my concerns and those of the hon. Member for Bolton, West, and the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who is about to speak. I hope that the Minister will urge his Department, during the current consultation phase of the pension and compensation reviews, to look closely at the shortcomings in the armed forces pension scheme, which affect everyone who served on pensionable terms. The Minister will be aware of how vigorously in recent months the Officers Pensions Society and many of its members have pressed for the consideration of injustices in the present scheme. The injustices bear most heavily on the widows of our service men—widows who followed the flag and showed as much loyalty as their husbands but now find that the arbitrary date of their husband's retirement may have a permanent and perpetually damaging effect on their own subsequent pension.

The recommendations of the pension and compensation reviews go some way to ensuring that such anomalies do not occur in future, but that is of little comfort to those who are disadvantaged by the present scheme. Given the frequent declarations by Ministers that our service personnel are unique in their commitment to the nation, I urge the Minister to keep in mind that those who have served previously were unique in their era of service and should be looked after as well as those who are serving now and those who will do so in future.

I turn to the activities of some local authorities in relation to pensions for war veterans and war widows, and the for once beneficial work of the broadcast media—in particular, the BBC programme "Money Box." By chance, I heard that programme on Radio 4 on 7 April, when it reported that war pensioners in the Labour-controlled borough of Harrow were about to lose, on average, almost £1,700 a year each. That was owing to the fact that the council, which like the overwhelming majority of other councils in England and Wales takes no account of war pensions when working out entitlements to help with rent and council tax, was thinking of ceasing to disregard the two types of pensions that some of their residents received: the war widows pension and the war disablement pension. The grand total of 53 war widows and pensioners in the borough were affected.

The programme went into some detail on the matter and interviewed, as a typical example, a widow called Dorothy. She said that she felt angry because

> "the people sitting behind the desks probably were not even born during the war"

and continued by saying that they had no conception of the struggle that she and her late husband had undergone. She pointed out that, when her husband was transferred from the Somerset Light Infantry to the Black Watch, and sent to Italy to be killed in action in 1944,

> "I got just a little bit of paper saying we regret to inform you your husband was killed on 9 July."

She added that she had been on her own ever since. Her daughter had died the previous year and it was being proposed to add almost £1,700 to her personal expenses.

At the time, Harrow council said that it had no choice. The deputy leader, Mr. Keith Toms, was interviewed on the programme. He had twice voted to cut the benefits paid to Dorothy and the other 52 war widows and war disabled pensioners. He said:

> "It's not an economy that we look at with a great deal of pleasure, but on the other hand when you come to consider that there are 53 people who are in receipt of £88,000, then, you know, this might mean that we can employ four school teachers or four social workers, so we really have had to look at the budget very hard this time."

As the presenter pointed out, the council was picking on one of the most deserving and poorest groups in the entire community. I am sure that it was as a result of the publicity generated by the programme that the council retreated on the matter a fortnight later. *The Sunday Times* had reported on 8 April that, although the council was proposing to save less than £90,000 by that dreadful, diabolical step, it had previously approved the spending of £226,000 on laptop computers to enable councillors to work from home and a further £30,000 had been earmarked to pay for a new employee to help to train the councillors in using those computers. That showed a strange sense of priorities. Although Labour-controlled Harrow council was compelled to retreat on the eve of the election, thanks to media exposure and embarrassment, the danger remains that such practices could be reinstated.

For many years, the Royal British Legion has campaigned for war disablement and war widows pensions to be disregarded because they should be seen not as state benefits but as compensation for the loss of amenity or the death of a husband in the service of our country. Under a previous Conservative Government in 1986, the Secretary of State for Social Services decided, wrongly in my view, to maintain local authorities' discretionary powers on whether to disregard war disablement and war widows pensions. Keith Toms, deputy leader of Harrow council, made a strange comment during the "Money Box" programme on 7 April:

> "We need to get to the stage where I believe it shouldn't be left at the discretion of local authorities, however small that number"—

the number of beneficiaries —

> "is. We need to have a national agreement on this."

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

It was strange that Keith Toms argued that he wished that he did not have the power to take the disastrous step that he was about to take and from which he eventually drew back, and it is unfortunate, to put it mildly, that councillors are in a position to inflict suffering on such deserving people. I hope that the Minister will address the matter and consider whether that discretion should not be removed from local authorities so that war disabled people and war widows should not go through the anguish and worry unfairly suffered by those 53 deserving people in Harrow.

Finally, I turn to the distress that is being caused to war veterans by diving to wrecks, which hon. Members in my party, as well as Liberal Democrats and Labour Members, have highlighted in early-day motions throughout this Session. I applaud them for so doing. Friends of War Memorials has pointed out that, since August 1914, just under 300 shipwrecks have been designated as war graves. The Government have powers under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 to designate those wrecks as controlled sites or protected places, but they have not done so. Until the Government invest those wrecks with the necessary protection, which they could provide if they undertook the necessary paperwork, the wrecks will continue to be plundered for souvenirs, causing massive offence and distress to those who regard the wrecks as the graves of loved ones who never came back from fighting to preserve this country's freedom in the first and second world wars.

It seems strange that such an issue should have to be raised at all in such a debate, at the turn of the century. It only goes to show the monumental insensitivity of people who, while professing an interest in history, defile that history and distress veterans and survivors of terrible conflicts. Without those conflicts and sacrifices, we would not enjoy our freedoms today, and people who engage in such sports would not enjoy the leisure time in which to amuse themselves. They do so carelessly, rather than respecting the graves of those to whom we owe so much.

11.40 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am pleased to take part in this timely debate and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) on securing it. During my time in Parliament, I have asked Tory and Labour Governments for an annual House of Commons debate on veterans' affairs. Both have denied it. I do not think that the matter should be left to Back Benchers. There should be an annual day's debate, along the lines of the annual debate on the Metropolitan police, which always falls in the late autumn. I hope that the Minister might take that on board and have a word with the people who work out the parliamentary timetable. It would be not only good politics, but right to have such a debate in Government time.

I am very proud of my associate membership of an ex-service organisation, and I am sure that you, Mr. Amess, are proud of yours. I am an associate member of the Grays, Thurrock branch of the Royal British Legion. Although the views that I utter this morning will be my own, I expect that they will find much support in that quarter and elsewhere.

Walking in Gibraltar, I once saw painted on a wall:

"God and soldier all men adore,
In time of trouble and no more,
For when war is over and all things righted,
God is neglected and old soldier slighted."

That sums up the collective guilt of the House and the people who have filled it for the past 80-odd years. It does not matter whether Governments are Tory, Labour or, as some used to be, Liberal. On failure and neglect of veterans, I would, in general, use the words, "They're all the same and they're all to blame."

Each Government can find things that they have remedied. The Minister will undoubtedly refer to some of the things that this Labour Government have achieved with some pride, and I associate myself with that pride. The person who will speak for the Conservative party will, no doubt, try to claim some credit for what Conservative Governments have done.

By and large, however, we have failed. We cannot be proud of that. It is a scandal that it has taken 80 years to designate a Minister as having special responsibility for veterans. I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West congratulate the Prime Minister on that, and I also congratulate him—I am very fond of him. However, he has something in common with his predecessor. Both said no to a veterans Minister. I am delighted that the Prime Minister has changed his mind. One lesson that I have learned in this place is that, if one keeps going, eventually one gets somewhere by attrition.

That is especially true when one knows that one is right, when that which is right is sensible, and when that which is sensible becomes inevitable. I have learned that, if one keeps ploughing away, eventually, there is change. I hope that the next Labour Government, elected in a few weeks' time, will be much more radical on a range of issues, and particularly in the area under discussion. The veterans Minister will need to be much more independent and self-standing. He should not be cluttered with other duties, as the present Minister is. His appointment is a major step forward, but we need to go much further.

I am not making a party point, but the Minister, like me, will take some delight in the fact that, under this Government, there has finally been a very generous ex gratia compensatory payment to people who were prisoners of the Japanese. That is a source of some pride for the Government. Previous Labour and Conservative Governments have considered it, but the present Government have done it, and I give them a bonus mark for that.

The Minister should revisit the reply that he gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) in an Adjournment debate about a month ago concerning compensation for people who were prisoners of the Germans in the second world war, but were not kept in accordance with the Geneva convention. I supported the hon. Gentleman in that debate and referred to my constituent, John Stevens. When his ship, HMS Gloucester, was sunk in the battle of Crete, he was one of the few survivors and was marched all the way through Europe. He languished as a prisoner of war in the IG Farben chemical factory, which was essentially a concentration camp close to the Auschwitz campus. He and many others who have written to me since the debate were not afforded their rights.

When the Minister responded to that debate, he did not hold out much chance of a change of view on the matter, but said that he would reconsider it. I urge him really to scratch the surface—not merely to take the brief that he has received from people in the historical branch of the Ministry of Defence. Successive Ministers have done no more than agree with those people, who come from a template—they are effectively the same people who were there 80 years ago. I want the Minister to say, "I hear what you're saying and now this is what we're going to do." He would do an enormous amount of good if he revisited the matter and met some of the people who have complained about not having been afforded their rights in their treatment by the Germans. Will he agree to do that?

The hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) raised a valid point about the disregard of the war disabled pension, but he over-egged it and fell into the temptation of making a party political point. I have been rehearsing all morning the phrase, "They're both to blame and both the same." The problem does not turn on Labour or Conservative councils, or Labour or Tory Governments, but on the fact that successive Ministers have failed to use legislative opportunities to do away with the discretion. It is absurd that a pensioner in one borough can have his benefits disregarded, while in another area that will not happen. Our next legislative programme should remove the temptation for municipal councils—which face enormous constraints—to do that. It is not fair to them or to other local authorities. I have pursued this matter since 1992 and it is clear that Labour and Conservative and some Liberal Democrat councils are the guilty parties—although that is not the appropriate term, because the temptation should not be there.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): We must not allow this myth to perpetuate itself. It is exclusively Labour councils that are behaving in this manner: no Liberal Democrat or Conservative council is doing so. Why do only Labour councils give in to the temptation?

Mr. Mackinlay: That is not so.

Mr. Key: Yes, it is.

Mr. Mackinlay: The message may have gone out to all Conservative councils that they should now fall into line. If so, full marks to them. However, that is not yet the case. I do not want to labour the point, but it is Governments who have failed to remove the discretion. If the Minister is still in his place after 7 June, I hope that he will reconsider the matter. Will he comment on the injustice involved for widows who married ex-service men after they left the services?

We should not have a debate about veterans issues without referring to the sad story of Gulf war syndrome. Hands up anyone who believes the Ministry of Defence about that. No one does. [*Interruption.*] I am referring to the Ministry of Defence, not the Minister. It is a fact that the Minister responsible for the armed forces under the Conservative Government was misled by the Ministry of Defence. No one has knocked him for that. In fact, he was the first to rush to the House about it. The Ministry of Defence has misled Ministers about Gulf war syndrome and it is continuing to frustrate some particularly unfair cases. For example, the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) has diligently pursued a particular case of a civilian who was working for the Ministry of Defence. He was literally in uniform, but the Ministry of Defence will not recognise any obligations to him. I hope that the Minister will intervene on such anomalies and break away from that which is being handed down by the bureaucracy.

The issue of Commonwealth war graves is another illustration of when matters come right in the end. I am pleased that Baroness Dean was appointed by the Government to head the inquiry. It has resolved matters concerning the battlefields of north-west Europe to the satisfaction of my fellow members of the Transport and General Workers Union and other trade unions. It would have been better if the unions had been listened to first, but the settlement is welcome and I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister for the Armed Forces were able to facilitate a resolution. Both Labour and Conservative Ministers have been sympathetic to the matter, but they have not tackled the Ministry of Defence.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): It is not the Ministry of Defence that is responsible.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am well aware that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is independent, but the British Ministry of Defence is very much the leading behind-the-scenes influence in the matter. The Secretary of State appoints some of the commissioners. Furthermore, he appointed Baroness Dean to provide the remedy and the outcome has been extremely helpful.

Recently, I questioned the Minister about the 49th West Riding division and 269 Squadron that held Iceland in the second world war, both of which have been denied the Atlantic star. I asked the Minister to meet them, but he ducked the issue.

Dr. Moonie: The answer is no, lest I be thought to be ducking something.

Mr. Mackinlay: That is disappointing, but it is an example of how I have to use attrition. Eventually, I shall be successful and a Minister will meet both the squadron and the division. Their case is that the committee that decided the award of medals immediately following the second world war was not fully cognisant with the circumstances of their role in Iceland. Surely my hon. Friend should listen to such a well-founded case. It is a wholly unsatisfactory state of affairs.

The hon. Member for New Forest, East referred to war graves in the sea. There is great scope for the Government to take the initiative on that. They need to pursue the UN cultural convention on the matter. A conference should be initiated by Her Majesty's Government that requires the participation of the principal maritime nations and the former belligerent nations of the first and second world wars and subsequent conflicts to see whether common legislation and enforcement can be achieved. I hope that the Minister will take up that helpful initiative. Moreover, off the shores of the Republic of Ireland are numerous war graves from both world wars.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

I have raised my final point many times. When we were in opposition, there was a free vote in the House of Commons on pardons for soldiers executed in the first world war. Over half the Labour shadow Cabinet was in the Division Lobby with me. When he was Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid) went some way towards acknowledging the wrongs of the executions. The men were suffering overwhelmingly from battle stress. They were denied the rules of natural justice. Their trials were flawed, but the Ministry of Defence resisted granting them pardons.

The Labour Government should revisit the matter. It is popular, although that should not be the reason for doing so; we should revisit it because it is right to do so. It would correct a sad part of our history that has only recently been written with clarity and precision having previously all been covered up. Documents were suppressed by the Ministry of Defence for 75 years. When those documents become available, and jurists, families, relatives, journalists and politicians say, "This is unfair", the Ministry of Defence turns around and says that it is too late to remedy the matter. It is not. Some loved ones of the people involved are alive.

We need to write history with clarity and precision—even matters that make us uncomfortable—and we shall do so if we grant the pardons. I want to mention people such as John Hipkin, Janet Booth and the late Tom Stones, who have campaigned for so long on the issue and were instrumental in creating an arboretum that will open in June to the memory of the 300-plus soldiers executed. Will the Ministry of Defence be present and facilitate the ceremonial, bearing in mind the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill and his moving statement to the House on the matter two years ago? It would be entirely consistent if the Ministry were to support the commemoration of the soldiers at the opening of the arboretum.

If we have such an annual debate, many more hon. Members will be able to contribute and raise issues such as those that have been raised this morning and to pursue much more fully matters such as whether there should be a Suez medal or an ex-national service personnel medal. I shall not labour the Chamber with such matters this morning as such measures are sensitive. However, with courage, the next Labour Government should approach them, discuss them more fully with ex-service organisations and meet the people who are campaigning for those medals. It is their right to have their day in court with the Minister and for him to listen to them. It would be generous of the Minister to suggest that that will be the spirit in which he approaches the subject.

Ex-service organisations should become much stronger and more confident. Uniquely among western democracies, ex-service organisations in this country do not have direct access in the way that ex-service organisations do in Germany or the United States of America. It is partly their fault: they are too much "Mr. Nice Guy". Any Prime Minister or Minister with responsibility for defence should have to defer to them much more enthusiastically. I hope that they will be much stronger in future and perhaps follow the example of the Officers Pensions Society, which raised the question of the trough, which I raised in the House previously. It is the result of—I am not proud of this—a Labour Government in the 1970s having a pay pause, which aggravated the position unfairly for ex-service men. Some 48,000 people—not only officers but people of all ranks—have been disadvantaged.

It is time to put the matter right. We have priorities because of the resources involved, but we must do what is right. I hope that the Minister responsible for veterans will have a long time in office and will scratch the surface on these issues more deeply than the people who held his portfolio, but not his title.

11.58 am

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) on having secured the debate, which has been fascinating and interesting. I congratulate the Minister on his new role and portfolio.

We heard two speeches from the Back Benches—from the hon. Members for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), who speak on defence issues with great authority in the House. Although I do not always agree with everything that they say, I always listen with great affection. They understand what they are talking about and are a tribute to the House.

I pay tribute to the members of Her Majesty's armed forces who serve on our behalf and protect the freedoms that the hon. Member for New Forest, East discussed. Anyone who speaks on defence issues, who has been through the parliamentary armed forces scheme and who deals with the armed forces regularly never fails to be astonished at their commitment. Since 1945, there has been only one year in which a member of Her Majesty's armed forces has not been killed on active service. Although the big wars of the past may be over, the sort of wars that we are beginning to witness will continue.

We have discussed a number of veterans' affairs. I wish to discuss a specific matter that affects more and more young men—and, increasingly, young women—who put themselves at risk in the defence of freedom. Veterans' affairs are not only about people who served in the second world war or first world war: people who serve today in our armed forces are the veterans of tomorrow.

I pick up on a case of which I have given the Minister notice, and which I have previously raised in Parliament. It is the case of the last person to die for Her Majesty's armed forces—Bombardier Brad Tinnion. He was killed in Sierra Leone at the end of last year during a paratrooper and Special Air Services attack to free the hostages of the West Side Boys.

Brad Tinnion was 28 when he was killed, and the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) paid tribute to him for his action. Sir Charles Guthrie spoke of him as a brilliant young man. Brad, like many people of his generation—not perhaps people of my or the Minister's generation—was not married. However, he had a partner with whom he had lived for 10 years, and they were on their third home together. Anna Homsi and he were regarded, to quote one sergeant major of the SAS regiment, as "more married than married". Indeed, when he died, Brad was aware that Anna was carrying the child, Georgia, who was later born to her. However, because Anna was not married to Brad and had not been through a form of marriage ceremony, the Ministry of Defence has refused to give her a war widow's pension.

The Ministry of Defence did give Georgia—a beautiful young girl whom I have met—a pension for her father, after getting Treasury dispensation. Georgia was granted a generous £2,000 a year until the age of 17, and Anna was given a one-off payment of £20,000. In a letter to me and Anna Homsi, the Secretary of State told Anna that, had she lived with Brad for six months before he joined the armed forces, she would be treated as a widow and receive the full widow's entitlement. Brad was only 16 when he joined the armed forces. I am not sure whether the Secretary of State was suggesting that they should have lived together when he was just 15.

The young lady is being deprived of a war widow's pension of £18,000 a year. She will have to return to full-time work and will not be able to look after her daughter in the manner that she would want, simply because the couple had not gone through a form of marriage ceremony, which more and more people today do not believe is necessary.

In the past 10 years, 394 members of the armed forces have been killed in active service. On average, 35 per cent. of such people are married, so we are discussing only a few hundred people. Some will have had long-term partners, such as Anna, and many will not. I wonder how many more partners of dead soldiers—male, female or, possibly in a short time, gay—will not be entitled to the recognition that should be given. How many more children will start to grow up thinking that the Army has let down their mother or father?

Ministers have told me that the matter is a big can of worms and that, if we get into it, we will have to start to give partners' rights to many people. It is claimed that sailors in Portsmouth will go into a pub in Portsmouth the night before they go to sea, find somebody, sleep with them, and then that person will claim to be a partner and thus entitled to rights. That is rubbish. The majority of private pension schemes accept that there should be a discretionary element and that one should be able to examine each individual case. If there have been only 394 cases in the past 10 years, that is hardly a massive requirement.

I do not suggest that unmarried partners should automatically have a right to service housing or to other effects that service men have. However, if a service man or woman pays the ultimate price for our country, the state should examine the possibility of giving something to that person's partner. After all, one of the last things that Brad did before he went to Sierra Leone was make a will, in which Anna Homsi was sole beneficiary. I have no doubt that he would have wanted her and his child to be treated properly.

It is ironic that, in this House, married and unmarried partners of hon. Members are entitled to be treated the same. Partners of hon. Members, whether married or unmarried—I am married, as is the Minister—are entitled to free rail tickets and the same access to the building, yet the country is not prepared to accept that partners who lay down their lives should be treated in a decent manner.

What is most annoying for Anna, to whom I spoke on the phone this morning, is that, in so many aspects of life, partners are now treated, rightly, as if they were married. The Child Support Agency does not bother to find out, before chasing ex-service men for money, whether they are married. Benefits agencies assess married and unmarried couples equally, as does the tax system. The country is moving forward. Although some hon. Members, who may be of a different generation, may not understand or like that, whoever is the Minister with responsibility for veterans in the next Government needs to address the matter. It simply is not good enough for Ministers to say, "I'm sorry Paul, we'll keep saying no on this." Like the hon. Member for Thurrock, I shall keep battling on the issue, and I hope that progress will be made.

One of the great aspects of our system is that, almost at this moment, the Prime Minister is seeking a dissolution of Parliament from Her Majesty the Queen. Our armed forces are Her Majesty's armed forces, and I am sorry that Her Majesty's Ministers have not decided, in this instance or in other instances like it, that they could be more generous. If the old adage is true that a dying person sees his life flash before him, I have no doubt that, when Brad Tinnion died, his last thoughts would have been for his partner of 10 years, Anna Homsi, and for the child whom he did not see. The next Government should treat such people with the respect that they deserve and with the respect that the regiment in which Brad served believes he should be accorded.

12.6 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) on raising this important issue. I agree with much of what she said. Her remarks about the Ministry of Defence keeping in touch with ex-service men were right. After all, it loses touch with about a third of reservists in the first year, which is not helpful to anybody.

One of the problems is that we do not go to war any more. The Falklands, the Gulf and the Balkans were all conflicts and technically, not, wars. It is also difficult to determine what is the front line and what is not. For all those reasons, it is difficult to know how the Ministry of Defence, when considering veteran's affairs, should treat sponsored reserves, contractors, civil servants who are in the front line, such as my constituents who work at Porton Down and who are in the front line of chemical and biological defence in Kuwait—

Mr. Mackinlay: And private industries.

Mr. Key: And, of course, private industries. We must think afresh and look forward, which is what I intend to do.

There is a large number of war veterans—about 15 million people, of all ages, are eligible to approach the Royal British Legion for support. That includes 291,000 war disability pensioners and war widows. The services provided by the Royal British Legion include resettlement, welfare, pilgrimages, job retraining, counselling and much more. Last year, the legion

[Mr. Key]

received more than 300,000 calls for help from eligible people. The Officers Pensions Society—which, incidentally, also deals with ranks other than officers—has a huge work load and is to be congratulated. I must, of course, mention the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association. On disregards, I entirely agree with the spirit of the remarks of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). There should be no question of partial disregards. When one considers the roll of honour of which widows are a part, it contrasts with the roll of shame of the only six local authorities in the country that make no disregard for war and war widows pensions—Chester-le-Street district council, Easington district council, Wear Valley district council, Manchester city council, South Tyneside metropolitan borough council and Gateshead metropolitan borough council.

Mr. Mackinlay: I want to ask a simple question. Why did not the hon. Gentleman support my private Member's Bill, which would have ended discretion? His party is as much to blame as the present Administration. However, I do not believe that Conservative or Labour Governments were to blame, except in so far as they permitted discretion to endure—

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. That has been a long and passionate intervention.

Mr. Key: There are still a few Members of Parliament who, like me, believe in local government democracy. The hon. Gentleman said that we should dictate to local authorities, but I believe that they should have discretion because they, like us, are elected. Therefore, they must accept their responsibilities.

With regard to the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), I wish to add a small word of caution. Many divers are responsible and we should not include them in the condemnation. I have received many representations from divers who are not careless about where and how they dive. Problems often arise in international waters, and the Government are, rightly, addressing that matter.

The issue of where to draw the line presents another problem. Apparently, although it is acceptable to raise the Mary Rose and to put it on display in Portsmouth, a distinction must be drawn after 1914. The issue is fraught with difficulty, but my hon. Friend was right to highlight the need for divers to be sensitive.

I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend on the service pension and the pension trough. That is a serious matter that must not be ignored. Our nation is getting richer—

Mr. Mackinlay: What about before?

Mr. Key: All I can say with regard to what happened in the past, is that that was then and this is now. Our nation is much wealthier. Although progress has been made, we must continue to move forward.

The issue is important and it requires detailed and very careful consideration. When my party is returned to government in a few weeks, it will commission a review of the current service pension system, which will place particular emphasis on the concerns that have been raised in the debate. The Select Committee on Social Security is also holding an inquiry on the matter and I suspect that hon. Members from all parties would like progress to be made.

I am delighted that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence has accepted the office of veterans Minister. However, much mythology surrounds the post. The comment of the hon. Member for Bolton, West that it had been considered only during the past couple of years is incorrect. In 1996, the Select Committee on Defence produced a report that recommended that there should be a veterans Minister. That report was unanimously supported by all parties, and I was one of the members of the Committee who signed it. It was inevitable that such a Minster would be created, irrespective of which party was returned to government following the 1997 general election. The Ministry of Defence was heading in that direction.

However, the decision had to be taken whether to establish a Department of Veterans Affairs, such as the one that exists in the United States of America, or a Minister with co-ordinating responsibility. That is the happy position at which we have arrived. The Minister made the announcement on 14 March 2001, but I quickly realised that something was not quite right about it, because we have had a Minister with responsibility for veterans affairs. The Cabinet Office guide to ministerial responsibilities that was published in January 2001 lists the Minister for the Armed Forces as responsible for service personnel policy, including veterans. Therefore, the role has been downgraded from the Minister of State to the Under-Secretary of State. That is an interesting development.

That point is akin to splitting hairs and I shall not dwell on it. However, a considerable amount of spin was put on the announcement, and when I probed the Department about the organisation and membership of the veterans forum and the veterans taskforce, I received a long answer stating that the final decision on such matters had not yet been taken. In other words, there is still a lot of work to do. Perhaps the Minister will fill us in on the detail today.

I also asked how much new money and manpower had been allocated to allow the Minister to fulfil the role, and I received a predictable answer: no new money and three new people. That will make little impression on the 15 million people who are entitled to seek the help of the Royal British Legion. Nevertheless, it is progress. I merely want the Minister to assure us that there will be more progress and that it will happen a bit sooner. Although I welcome the appointment of a war veterans Minister, given that the Select Committee reported in 1996 and the strategic defence review finally reported in 1998, why has the Ministry of Defence only now got around to writing the press release on what is happening?

I end on a positive note. One of the problems touched on by the hon. Member for Bolton, West was the serious lack of statistics kept by the Ministry of Defence, although it keeps a large number of them. In the Gulf war, we experienced problems because no records were kept of whom was inoculated, you will not be surprised to hear, Mr. O'Hara, that as Member of Parliament for Porton Down I probed the matter. I was told that the record-keeping in the second world war, especially regarding the inoculation of soldiers in the north African desert, was much better than that achieved by the Ministry of Defence in the Gulf war. We must make progress on that problem.

A measure that was initiated by the previous Government should be accelerated—electronic tagging. That was proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) when he was Minister for the Armed Forces in 1996, but progress has been slow, if not non-existent. I have asked parliamentary questions since then and raised the matter in debate as recently as last year. After all, a report in *Computer Weekly* in October 2000 headed, "US Military Gets Smart Cards", stated that:

> "The United States will issue a card to 4 million personnel"

by this year. The cards will cover digital identity and include

> "building access and financial access, as well as access to government information"

and personal medical records. We must make progress on such a project, to avoid getting into the mess we experienced in the Gulf war.

I look forward to the Minister's response. I regret only that we did not each have 20 minutes in which to put our points.

12.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) for giving us the opportunity to consider the concerns of our war veterans. Many in our country have no direct experience of military service and it is easy to lose sight of the sacrifices made by those who served in our armed forces and by their families. Some are veterans of the major wars of the previous century who are now facing the wide range of problems that come with time—health, making ends meet or simply the concern that their efforts have not been recognised or that their sacrifices have been forgotten.

Many veterans, however, served in more recent operations and their problems can be different. Some have experienced difficultly in adjusting to civilian life or in finding employment. Some have become homeless and some are incapacitated through illness or injury resulting from their service. Our concern should not end with the individual who served in the services. Military service has cost many dependants a wife, husband, father or mother, and relatives of those who died may experience a range of problems, such as single parenthood, financial hardship and the heavy burden of personal loss.

The risks attached to a service career are high and it is right that we should give particular recognition to the needs of those who have served their country. Whatever their particular contribution, our veterans and their families have played a major part in securing the peace and security of our nation. The Government are determined to deal with their concerns effectively and with a proper focus. It was with that aim in mind that, on 14 March, the Prime Minister announced my appointment as Minister with responsibility for veterans' affairs. It is a privilege to be given that responsibility and I am conscious of the expectations that come with the appointment. I am determined to succeed and know that I have the Prime Minister's full support.

My task is to ensure that the response to veterans' concerns is co-ordinated throughout government—whether central, regional or local—to deliver a properly integrated service. Individual Departments and local authorities are invariably conscientious in trying to deal with veterans' concerns, but, in the past, they have tended to do that issue by issue. The role of the ministerial taskforce will be to ensure that veterans' concerns are understood and dealt with as a coherent and seamless whole. We plan the first meeting of the taskforce for later this summer. I am sure that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who speaks for the Opposition, would be happy to fill that role in the unlikely event that he is called on to do so. I mean that in no personal sense.

We also wish to work more effectively with many veterans' charities. Those groups undertake excellent work in supporting former members of the armed forces, but we are determined that our efforts and theirs be better co-ordinated. We often work in different areas. There can be gaps or overlaps in the support that we provide. We bring different strengths to our work and our individual understanding of the worries of veterans is often incomplete. There are already close working relationships between individual Departments and particular charities, but we can achieve more by effective co-operation.

The veterans forum will provide the opportunity for representatives of several veterans charities to help us to define our agenda for veterans, identify those issues of the deepest concern and ensure that we concentrate our collective efforts on those areas in which we can make a substantial difference. From the Government's perspective, it will also allow us to tap into the knowledge and skills of veterans organisations more effectively. I am confident that those arrangements will bring a new dynamism to our handling of such issues, and veterans, for their part, can look forward to real improvements in the support that they receive.

That is not to say that much has not already being achieved for veterans through the efforts of the Government and the charitable sector. It is easy, whether looking at the media or listening to debates such as this, to lose sight of the many good things that are happening. The rough sleepers initiative has done much to deal with homelessness among ex-service personnel. We have recently introduced regulations to extend reservists' eligibility for benefits for illness, injury or death resulting from service. In addition, we have a pensions scheme, which, although I accept it is not perfect, is the envy of many throughout the world. We should not forget the considerable support that we already give our veterans. However, clearly, issues need to be addressed, several of which have been raised in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West referred to homelessness. We recognise the problems and we are working closely with the rough sleepers unit at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and ex-service charities to deal with them. Our approach is focused on the three key points of pre-discharge, the point of discharge and post-discharge. As

[Dr. Lewis Moonie]

my hon. Friend said, Catterick garrison has been chosen to host a pilot project, funded by the rough sleepers unit and run by the English Churches housing group, to provide accommodation advice to service personnel who are about to be discharged from the armed forces.

The project is known as the single persons accommodation centre for the ex-services—SPACES. It is amazing how acronyms can be concocted; it is just as well that we have them, given the lengthy title of the project. It has no housing of its own, but assists in the search for suitable accommodation for single leavers. The point of discharge group should be successfully targeted by the project, which aims to identify vulnerable service leavers and prevent them from falling into the cycle of homelessness and rough sleeping. After 18 months, we shall review the success of the project and, if it is deemed a success, further projects will be set up.

The MOD has long been committed to ensuring that service personnel make a smooth transition back to civilian life. To that end, it has a comprehensive career transition service that is provided by the career transition partnership: a partnership between the MOD and Coutts Consulting Group. That provides a wide-ranging service for all personnel with five or more years' service who are discharged for medical reasons or who are leaving because of redundancy. The service includes guidance on financial, housing and welfare issues together with practical advice on job finding for up to two years post-discharge.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West made a good point about those with more limited service and we shall certainly be willing to consider that during our review. In addition, financial advice briefings are arranged by the CTP at 10 regional resettlement centres and are open to all service personnel. The briefings provide impartial advice on pension schemes, savings and financial management as well as on how best to obtain suitable living accommodation. All service personnel are also eligible to attend briefings on housing options run by the joint service housing advice office, which include the opportunity to discuss individual cases. About 1,500 personnel attend such briefings annually. We are by no means complacent about the current position and keep it under regular review. However, it is important to recognise that some 20,000 people leave the armed forces every year, and that the overwhelming majority make a successful transition to civilian life.

We recognise that post-traumatic stress disorder is both serious and disabling. Preventive measures are in place, including pre-deployment and post-deployment briefing and counselling during deployments. The strategic defence review recommended that community psychiatric services be enhanced. That has resulted in proposals to increase staffing at some existing defence community psychiatric centres, and the formation of two new centres—one in Scotland and one in England. The arrangements have been developed over a number of years and will continue to be reviewed in the light of medical developments in stress management and treatment.

In terms of the nature of the challenge that we face, the spectrum of psychiatric disorders in the armed forces is broadly similar to that in the community at large. Limited peer review evidence has been published on how to treat such disablements, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder. Evidence exists confirming the usefulness of certain psychological treatments, but many unknown factors remain, including the question of whether treatment should be in-patient or out-patient based, the precise composition of such treatment, and whether it should be based on individual or group therapy. The exact role of therapeutic drugs also remains unresolved.

On treatment of mental illness in respect of those who have left the armed forces, it is Government policy to ensure that the NHS makes proper provision for health services. The Government have identified mental illness as one of their three health priorities and have addressed it in their framework for mental health. The framework includes significant extra investment of more than £300 million in the NHS plan for mental health service development in the next three years. According to that framework, most locally based NHS services should be able to offer effective treatment for psychological injury.

We do not think it necessary to treat psychological injury cases by providing substantial periods of in-patient care; indeed, in general, every effort is made in psychiatry to avoid admitting in-patients. Patients, including those in community psychiatric care, are most likely to be looked after by primary care teams, with a percentage referred to consultant psychiatrists as out-patients. Periods as an in-patient are likely to be brief and, I suspect, will mainly involve those for whom drug and/or alcohol dependence is an issue. Equally, there might well be a need for sporadic acute admissions where symptoms become severe.

War disablement pensioners have been entitled to priority NHS treatment since the former Ministry of Pensions hospitals were transferred to the NHS. Priority is determined by the clinician in charge, and is subject to the needs of emergencies and other urgent cases. Priority treatment is a matter for the Department of Health and the NHS executive, and is the subject of regular circulars to trusts and individual practitioners. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West that I will take a very close look at the matter through the Ministry's taskforce, and see whether anything can be done to improve co-ordination.

Given that I have dealt with the main issues raised by my hon. Friend, and given the limited time remaining, perhaps I should move on to some of the other points to which reference has been made. On the question of war graves at sea, it should not have escaped the notice of the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) that I announced a major review of the present system and gave a personal promise to ensure that proper respect is paid to war graves. That does not mean, however, that people will not be allowed to dive on them, just as we would not prevent people from walking through a graveyard. We will take careful action, in co-ordination with other countries—I accept the need for that—to ensure that visitors respect sites. That is the key.

I believe that my role in respect of veterans will lead to better co-ordination between Departments and a much sharper focus on important issues. Although that is but one—albeit the major—aspect of what is an increasingly large and diverse portfolio, I assure all hon. Members present that I will pay very close attention to it. On the question of to whom to write in respect of individual cases, one may write to me or to the individual Department concerned. General issues will be dealt with by me and more specific ones by the relevant Department.

On pensions—I am sorry to appear to repeat the long-standing policy of Governments—whatever changes might be made, there will be no retrospection.

It is most unlikely that we shall consider revisiting that issue, although I recognise that people feel that they have been badly treated. That I do not see us revisiting it does not mean that I shall not reconsider it on occasion. I shall not consider a change in policy, but I might consider whether anything could be done at its margins.

Best Value (Local Government)

12.30 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In the Ludlow constituency there are two district councils, six town councils and dozens of parish councils. To put that in context, in the area of Bridgnorth district council there is a population of more than 50,000 and in the area of South Shropshire district council there is a population of more than 40,000. However, in terms of best value, both those district councils must work to the same yardstick as the city of Birmingham, which is not far away, where the population is more than 1 million. Leaving aside the principle, which I shall come to presently, the cost of best value to my constituents is wholly disproportionate. On the basis of the figures available, far from saving council tax payers' money, it causes the council tax to be higher than it need otherwise be.

For example, Bridgnorth town council's budgeting expenditure for the current year is £436,468. The town clerk, Mrs. Kathy James, says that the estimated cost of best value to the town council for 2001 is between £10,000 and £15,000, which is between 2 per cent. and 3.5 per cent. of its total budget. The town clerk also says that no overall savings have been identified. The entire process of operating best value has involved only expenditure and a vast amount of time. The town clerk referred me to a magazine entitled *Shropshire Review*, in which Councillor Ed Shirley, who is chairman of the town council's best value committee, stated:

> "The first year's report gained considerable praise from the independent auditor. The conclusion was that the council is run efficiently and no savings could be made that were not already being implemented."

He continued:

> "the mandatory Best Value plan is unnecessary and self-defeating as well as being an administrative and financial burden...There is a new cost to residents of over 3 per cent. of the annual precept, which will be reflected in their council bills. This is to cover extra administration, legal and auditors fees etc.—in effect money spent to show we can't save money."

What that means at district council level is illustrated by Councillor Michael Williams, the chairman of South Shropshire district council, who advises me that the cost of implementing best value is £243,560, the equivalent of no less than 5 per cent. of the £4.8 million total annual budget for that authority. The total savings of £97,264 were gained at a cost of close to £250,000, which is bad business and not cost-effective. However, that is what the Government oblige the local authority to do. Furthermore, local householders pick up the tab in the shape of unnecessarily inflated council tax demands.

Councillor Williams also took the opportunity to point out that another unwarranted and unwanted impost of central Government—I refer to the new political structures—will add a further £60,000 cost to council tax bills for South Shropshire district council, expenditure which will inevitably be at the expense of first-line services.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gill: I gladly give way to another Shropshire Member.

Mr. Paterson: My hon. Friend mentioned services. Is he aware that today the Shropshire and Wrekin fire

[Mr. Paterson]

authority is putting in a section 19 application to reduce Whitchurch, Market Drayton, Ludlow, Bridgnorth and Newport fire stations from two pumps to one to save £90,000? The chief fire officer told me in February that best value cost £66,000 and that that, plus the cost of a performance and quality manager and best value support office, is almost certainly more than the cost savings of the two fire engines. He said that the best value process has not, as yet, yielded any savings for the fire authority. The document is costing services in Shropshire.

Mr. Gill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that contribution. He has mentioned the point that I want to make to the Minister: as far as small local authorities are concerned—I think that one can generalise and extend that to all those in Shropshire—the savings are far outweighed by the cost of best value. I talked to Bridgnorth district council and received a letter from it that said:

> "The net Budget Requirement for Bridgnorth District Council 2001/02 is £4.253M of which, a 2 per cent. anticipated Best Value saving would free just £85,000."

That is a small saving and the cost of best value—£102,000 per year—far outweighs it. The letter went on:

> "In addition to the above, it has been necessary for the Council to purchase an additional 100 days of audit time at an annual cost of nearly £20,000 in order to free up the Head of Scrutiny's time to supervise the whole process. Furthermore, the time invested by officers undertaking the reviews and ancillary procedures, not only detracts from the frontline service to the customer, but also adds significantly to the true cost of best value."

The directly attributable additional cost for the previous and current year is £86,000 and £102,000 respectively. It is likely that the marginal costs of officer and member time could at least double those figures. The acting chief executive said in another letter:

> "I share the frequently expressed concern of members here that the costs of the Best Value regime for a small, prudent, rural Authority such as ourselves may ultimately outweigh the benefits and savings from the process."

I also talked to an experienced and dedicated councillor, Michael Wood, who, having previously served on county and county borough councils, now sits on the best value steering group at Bridgnorth district council. He told me that there are no savings, no benefit and very little change in practice as a consequence of implementing best value procedures. He also pointed out that the cost to council tax payers is bound to rise when the Government's subsidisation of the district auditor ends and when, in 12 months' time, the real cost of the district auditor are charged in full. Apart from the directly attributable and identifiable costs of implementing best value procedure, there are the additional costs of senior officers' time spent as monitoring officers of best value study teams, and the consequential, but largely unquantifiable, costs of such officers' being taken off the duties that they were appointed to perform.

The story does not end there. I am reliably informed that in the central region—one of five regions in England—the Government are recruiting up to 80 people at a basic salary of £30,000 per annum to staff a best value inspectorate. To supervise a project the cost-effectiveness of which is already a proven negative, there will now be a whole hierarchy ranging from internal auditors directly employed by the local authorities, to district auditors employed by Government, and the best value inspectorate, which will cost upwards of £12.5 million per annum in salaries alone, will be superimposed on top.

The nub of the question is, why have the Government imposed the new requirements? Is it because there have previously been no controls? The answer to that is, most emphatically, no. With internal and external audits and a whole range of performance indicators in place, it would be spurious for Ministers to argue that spending, especially in small local authorities such as the Bridgnorth and South Shropshire district councils, was out of control.

Is it because the Government are determined to clamp down on bureaucracy and public spending? Clearly not, when the consequence of best value, as I have illustrated, is at least 400 additional civil service posts in the best value inspectorate and additional, unwarranted and unnecessary expenditure at national and local level. Have the Government identified some significant, specific on-going abuse in local authority spending that comes anywhere near to rivalling their own crass incompetence over, for example, the dome at Greenwich? I think not.

We have here a deliberate assault on the fundamentals of local democracy. We elect our councillors to carry out certain functions and, through the ballot box, have the ultimate sanction, if we wish to exercise it, of getting rid of them if they fail. If it is thought that our councillors are not achieving best value on our behalf, we can remove them. That is how democracy works.

The imposition of best value regulations on local authorities is only one part of the Government's assault on local democracy and accountability. The Government have decreed that the political structures that have served local government so well for so long must be abandoned in favour of structures that are barely comprehensible to the general public.

As if that were not bad enough, the long-suffering council tax payers, having been required to express their views on the new political structures, are now requested to give their views on the annual best performance plans. They are expected to do that not just once, but three times in the questionnaires sent to them by the town council, district council and county council. If, perchance, the councils do not get the requisite number of returns, they must send out the forms again until they do. What a ridiculous waste of time and money.

Such things are not about improving accountability or strengthening local government, but about negating local democracy and imposing the will of an increasingly bureaucratic and authoritarian Government. I suggest that the commissars in the Government—I use that term advisedly, knowing that several members of the Cabinet had links with communism—get their tanks off the lawns at Stonehouse, Westgate and the Shirehall and concentrate their fire on getting best value in Whitehall.

As a minimum, the Government should immediately take local authorities where the population is lower than 250,000 out of the requirements altogether and save us all a huge amount of cash. For the small local authorities in my constituency, the requirements are unnecessary, unwanted and totally disproportionate. I trust that the Minister will recognise the strength of that argument and take the necessary action.

Before I sit down, I should like to show the Chamber the collection of papers and publications to do with best value that have accumulated on my desk during the past few weeks, and began to do so before I thought of applying for an Adjournment debate on the topic. Does anyone actually read publications such as the one that I have in my hand—the best value performance plan for Shropshire county council? Is it reasonable to expect councillors to go through such lengthy documents when they know that, at the end of the day, the plans will cost more than the amount that is saved?

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): I found it very interesting to listen to the points made by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill). Although I did not agree with a word that he said, I am grateful for the opportunity to put a different perspective on best value and the wider local government reforms that we are trying to achieve. We must see best value as part of that wider reform. We want to make councils more accessible and more demonstrably accountable to local people. If the hon. Gentleman does not think that that is necessary, I must disagree with him.

Mr. Gill: I hope that the Minister recognises that I speak not just personally, but on behalf of all the people whom I represent. If she thinks that the councillors in my constituency are not worried about these measures, she has misunderstood everything that I have said.

Ms Hughes: In the course of my reply, I will tell the hon. Gentleman why I think that he is wrong about that and is not representing the generality of local people's views about their local councils. I make no apology for the fact that the Government are determined to bring the highest standards of excellence and accountability to local government and the services on which local people depend. Best value is at the heart of that. It provides the basis for making local councils more efficient and effective organisations, where performance counts, and they must be accountable for that performance.

Performance plans—which the hon. Gentleman derided—play a central role in delivering best value. They are there to put key performance data and information into the public domain and, partly in that way, to drive up standards. That is why they are so important.

I want to say a little about performance plans. A performance plan is an important feature of any performance-related organisation. In local government, it benefits both the council and local people. First, it enables the council to bring together in one place important corporate information about what has been achieved against the previous year's targets, the future targets that the council is setting itself and the action that it intends to take to try to achieve those targets.

Mr. Gill: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: No; I shall just finish this point.

That information is not bogged down in excessive detail, but it is critical for the effective management of performance in areas that matter.

Secondly, a performance plan is important for local people. They have a stake in all this—they pay for their services with their taxes, so they should know how good or not so good those services are, and should be able to influence the way that the council is going. They can do so only if the information is easily available.

That is what a performance plan does. It is not rocket science. I am stunned that the hon. Gentleman can talk in such a way about the kind of routine practice that any small business with a much smaller turnover than that of either of these two district councils would have to adopt to look to its costs and its quality and to seek continually to drive up its performance standards. That is what best value is about.

Mr. Gill: Does not the Minister recognise that many of the people who sit on local authorities are business people? Is not the arrogance of the Government revealed by their belief that those people, when left to their own devices, cannot get it right? Does not that demonstrate the philosophy of a Labour Government who always believe that the man in Whitehall is right and who always want to override local democracy?

Ms Hughes: I say two things in response to that. First, across the board, local councils have not got it right. If they had, we would not see, before best value, such a huge variability in the standards of service that different councils achieve and in the unit costs of providing those services. There is great variability, which cannot be explained by local circumstances. It is explained by the fact that some councils can provide services well and with good value for money, but others, I am afraid, do not.

Secondly, best value is not about telling councils what they should do, but about requiring them to perform their functions within a framework that ensures that they themselves have continually to look to what they are doing, account for what they are doing, try to drive down costs and try to drive up standards of service. What they choose to do, the priorities that they set and the way that they choose to go about it—

Mr. Gill: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: No. I have given way enough and I need to make these points.

The way in which councils choose to go about it is for them to determine. The only non-negotiable points are that they seek best value, produce a performance plan that sets down their priorities and targets, review their services periodically and demonstrate that they are achieving best value over a period.

Mr. Gill: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: No; I will continue because the hon. Gentleman has made his points, and I must make mine.

[Ms Hughes]

I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not want to require of district councils, whose turnover greatly exceeds that of most small businesses, practices that small businesses, if they are worth their salt, would regard as routine.

Mr. Gill: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: No; I will not give way.

Mr. Gill: It is not a debate, then.

Ms Hughes: I have given way twice, but the hon. Gentleman keeps coming back with the same point. I understand the points that he is making, but I disagree with him and I need the time to explain why.

We are now in the second year of best value. Leaving aside Bridgnorth and South Shropshire, which I shall come to in a minute, what is the record so far? Last year, every authority produced a best value performance plan, of which only 6 per cent. received an adverse audit opinion. That, to my mind, is some achievement. Most local authorities got stuck in and did their plan well, although the plans were all different because one size does not fit all. They adapted the process of producing the plan to their local circumstances; there were some imaginative approaches. Councils also put a great deal of effort into getting the necessary information out. Bridgnorth was part of the 6 per cent. of councils that had an adverse report on their best value performance plan because its plan, which was not good, did not approach the exercise in the right way.

Councils said that focusing on and preparing for the performance plan helped them to look closely at their performance. Some 87 per cent. of chief executives said that they would produce a similar plan again, even if they were not required to do so. They found the plan to be an enabling process, which helped them to think more robustly and rigorously about what they were spending their money on and what their priorities should be.

The issue of costs has been an important feature of the hon. Gentleman's complaints. There are concerns, which I acknowledge, but they must be seen in the context of the benefits of best value. There are costs—in terms of time and money—of producing the plan, of carrying out best value reviews, of introducing performance information systems if local councils do not have them in place already and of consulting the community, which is an essential feature of best value.

First, some of those costs are one-off and, if an authority has not been operating in the way that is now proposed, its one-off costs will be frontloaded as it sets up those systems. If a council did not have a proper performance information system, it should have had one. That is a cost to any effective organisation and most in the private sector will already be familiar with that.

Secondly, some of those early costs were self-imposed. Some of the best performance plans—I have already remarked on the great variety—were the simplest and least expensive. They were more focused and had been designed to fit their purpose, rather than being driven by a fear of audit. For many councils, there is great scope for reducing costs. For example, Wiltshire county council, Wiltshire police authority and the associated district councils saved £35,000 by coming together to produce a joint summary of their performance plan in an attractive newspaper format.

Mr. Gill: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: No; I shall finish shortly.

Thirdly, there have been costs of audit and inspection. To offset those costs, the Government have provided grant to the Audit Commission and increased the revenue support grant to councils. The year one audit of the performance plan inevitably had to go into more depth to check on the underlying systems; the year two audit will be integrated with the financial audit and I expect costs to reduce significantly.

Similarly, we are examining inspection. Rather than having a "one size fits all" approach, it is possible to move towards a risk-based approach to inspection. If we can do so, it will bring the cost of inspection down for authorities that perform well and it will be an incentive for those that do not.

However, the costs are only one side of the coin. There are benefits, as some small district councils—although perhaps not Bridgnorth and South Shropshire—are demonstrating: working in partnership with others, involving the public through the consultation process, and delivering economies of scale that are producing savings as well as improved standards of service. I wonder to what extent the two district councils to which the hon. Gentleman referred have seriously considered using the potential of best value to demonstrate and deliver new approaches to services. Have they developed a cost-effective arrangement with Shropshire county council, for example, which is doing very well in terms of best value? Have they been willing to work with it to achieve cost savings and improved services?

Mr. Gill: The short answer to the Minister's question is yes, of course there is co-operation. However, does she accept the central point that it is not good business to allow such savings to be far outweighed by the cost of achieving them? I represent not only councillors but council tax payers, and the inevitable result of such measures is that charges will rise. Council tax payers will not be happy to discover that their bills have been needlessly inflated.

Ms Hughes: What is putting up the cost to council tax payers is not investment in best value and a culture that seeks simultaneously to drive down costs and to improve and increase the standard of service, but councils that are running their services inefficiently and ineffectively. Councils must regard best value as an investment and enter into it in that spirit—indeed, many small councils have done so. Tandrige district council and Reigate and Banstead district council, for example, have jointly tendered their audit services. By issuing a joint contract, they will achieve a 15 per cent. cost saving. Hampshire county council has entered into a countywide waste management partnership with Portsmouth unitary council, Southampton unitary council and 11 district councils. That will not only drive up rapidly the proportion of recycled waste, but achieve a significant reduction in cost. Small councils such as South Norfolk district council and Burgess Hill town council—I could continue with a long list—have approached best value in the spirit in which it is meant to be approached. They are achieving higher standards of services, and cost savings that outweigh the cost of the best value regime.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we are doing all this. The answer is that we want services to improve, we want council tax payers to have better value for their money, and we certainly want more accountability to local people. The hon. Gentleman talked about local democracy. There is nothing democratic about a council that does not open its doors, or involve local people in decisions on the services that it provides and their cost. Nor is there anything democratic in the turnouts for some of our local elections.

Mr. Paterson: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: No, I will not.

Some people are so turned off by their local council that they do not even bother to vote.

At the heart of the best value process is the principle that local people must be involved. They must be consulted on the priorities that councils set and on the way in which councils achieve their objectives; hence the duty in the best value process to consult local people.

Mr. Paterson: Will the Minister give way on that very point?

Ms Hughes: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. I have only two minutes and I intend to use them myself.

We are not talking about an item on a wish list. When a council publishes its performance plan or implements the recommendations of a best value review, it will need to be able to show that it has taken the views of local people and local stakeholders into account. That will give local people the information that they need to vote in elections in the way that the hon. Member for Ludlow wants, and to say what they think about how their council is performing. Given the matter that the hon. Gentleman was decrying earlier, I was surprised to learn that he regards as a complete waste of money the requirement for councils to produce, and to provide public access to, information. Unless the public have information, they cannot take action, whether in local elections or in other forums.

In conclusion, best value has been accepted within councils right across the country. We are beginning to see significant changes in service delivery. Best value is beginning to make a real difference on the ground. Quite simply, there are better services for local people, more widespread engagement and lower costs.

Motor Cycling

1 pm

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): I am delighted to have been able to secure this important debate on motor cycling and I am delighted that the Minister is here to respond. I am chair of the all-party motor cycling group. It is extremely active, with members in both the Commons and the Lords. We have taken up some serious issues relating to motor cycling over the past three years while I have been a member.

There are about 1 million motor cyclists in Britain today, which is a substantial proportion of the population. The size of the national fleet is sometimes debatable, but 1 million is a fair estimate. For many people motor cycling is an easy, affordable, accessible and convenient form of transport. They have chosen to use motor cycles to get to work, to see their friends to go out in the evening and to do all the things that we do in our communities.

For many motor cyclists, myself included, motor cycling is also a passion—it is in their heart. They perhaps love their bikes more than most car drivers love their cars. The issues surrounding motor cycling are therefore extremely important to them. I am pleased that we have parliamentary time today to explore some of those issues. It will inevitably be a canter through the issues as it is a big agenda and I know that the Minister will want to respond in detail on some specific issues.

I am pleased that the Government, for the first time ever, have established an advisory group on motor cycling to represent the motor cycle industry, the British Motorcyclists Federation, the Motorcycle Action Group, the Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club and a host of road users and people who are concerned about these issues. It is a sign of the Government's commitment: they see the role of motor cycles and powered two-wheelers generally as important in developing transport strategies.

The advisory group on motor cycling has just issued its first interim paper, which is quite detailed. As is par for the course with this Government, they have set up a number of taskforces to examine the issues in greater detail. They are all reporting back and doing excellent work. I want to press the Minister on the development of a motor cycle strategy. We have the advisory group, but we need to move on to a clear set of proposals for putting motor cycles and powered two-wheelers at the heart of transport policy. The report talks about producing a strategy in 2003. I should like the Minister to confirm that timetable.

One of the things for which motor cyclists most often press is the ability to use bus lanes. That would help to free up traffic in cities and towns. As motor cyclists, we feel that we have a major role to play in easing congestion. If motor cycles could use bus lanes we could speed the traffic along, whether for couriers, dispatch workers or people on their way to work. A host of users could get through the traffic much more swiftly. That would not just ease congestion, but would reduce pollution, as there would be fewer idling machines and emissions would be reduced.

There have been a number of experiments on the use of bus lanes in Reading and Bristol, and in Hull, in the constituency of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The local

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authorities there have been progressive and have been prepared to look at the use of bus lanes by motor cycles. I am disappointed that the report of the advisory group says in paragraph 34:

> "The Department is keen to see proper monitoring and evaluation of the effect of PTWs in bus lanes. It is a practice that has developed in a number of local authorities...However, to date, no thorough evaluation has been done."

Some of those experiments have been going on for many years. The time is long overdue for proper evaluation and research, to discover what does and does not work and its effect on other road users. It is a substantial policy and I hope that the Government will undertake proper evaluation to ensure that we learn the lessons from previous experiments. If bus lanes help to speed traffic flow and to reduce congestion and pollution, we shall urge local authorities to adopt them.

It is not a matter of the Government's dictating what happens; local authorities have an important role in implementing many of the proposals. However, the Government can endorse those proposals, give them a fair wind and say that they are rooted in research, based on fact and a very good thing to do. I hope that there will be a much more widespread use of bus lanes in future.

I want to discuss the need for secure parking. For years, motor cyclists have not had access to secure parking, especially in towns and cities, and the problem of motor cycle theft is immense, perhaps because motor cycles are easy to steal. It is hard to make a motor cycle theftproof; one has to invest in locks, chains, concrete posts and so on to reduce theft. A simple way of cutting motor cycle theft would be for local authorities to provide simple, cheap roadside or kerbside bars to which bikes could be chained, so that there was less chance of their being stolen.

Approximately 20,000 motor cycles are stolen every year. As I said, for most motor cyclists their bike is their passion. When my motor cycle was stolen I went on a crusade to recover it, and was able to wheel it back to my house. I know how angry motor cyclists are about motor cycle theft.

I am pleased that the Government's local transport plan guidance recommends local authorities to consider the appropriate number of parking spaces needed for motor bikes and the need for good access to them. It also encourages local authorities to introduce secure parking where possible. A helpful amendment to the law last year enabled local authorities to provide secure parking without being accused of obstructing the highway. We must encourage more local authorities to take note of these issues.

I spoke recently to people in my local authority about a range of issues such as bus lanes, secure parking, road maintenance and so on. They said, "We have never thought about these important matters because we do not have a motor cyclist on our local advisory group and there is no one to bring these issues to our attention. No one in our department rides a motor bike. No one in the highways department has highlighted these issues." It would help if the Government suggested that local authorities' consultative committees should make positive attempts to encourage motor cyclists from their local community to bring their perspective and ideas to community-based discussions. Local authorities could perhaps place an advertisement in the local paper asking motor cyclists who might be interested in taking part in policy making to come forward.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that one advantage of the involvement of bikers in planning and policy making is that it helps to destroy the unfortunate stereotype, to which even Ministers are not wholly immune, that occasionally casts motor cyclists as aggressive and antisocial? My hon. Friend and I were present at a meeting of the motor cycle group when we heard the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) claim that he had once ridden from Great Britain to Greece wearing only a baseball cap. He later qualified that by saying that he was referring to head covering—he did not like crash helmets—but by then an awful image had lodged in the mind, which is the stuff of nightmares to this day. Does my hon. Friend accept that most motor cyclists are not antisocial, but responsible adults who recognise that powered two-wheelers represent a fuel-efficient, cheap, accessible, efficient and guaranteed method of transport in urban areas?

Mr. Edward O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. This is a rather long, although interesting, intervention.

Mr. Pound: I thought that the mention of Greece might distract you, Mr. O'Hara. In conclusion, I say that if, at the weekend, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) had been at the London motor cycle museum in Greenford—that temple to the best of British iron, a gallery of motor cycling excellence—she would have seen exactly what she wanted to see: motor cyclists in the London borough of Ealing setting out their stall and working with the local authority for the betterment of us all.

Ms Blears: I am delighted to hear that information from my hon. Friend. He is right that motor cycling used to have an aggressive macho image, but nothing could be further from the truth nowadays. I am proud to ride a Yamaha Virago 535S. More women are taking up motor cycling and thoroughly enjoying it, especially on beautiful sunny days like today. Yesterday I took my bike for a spin and it was great fun.

I want to move on to road safety education. A GCSE that concentrates on motor cycling is available. It has practical and theoretical elements. It teaches young people to be safe on the roads and, hopefully, reduces the number of accidents. Unbelievably, it is accredited as a GCSE only in Northern Ireland. It is taught in this country, but not within the school curriculum, and it is difficult to get it accepted in England and Wales. Will the Minister work with Education Ministers to find a way of accrediting that GCSE in this country? It is useful and engaging, especially for young men of 15 or 16 who may not be turned on by the traditional curriculum but would enjoy taking a GCSE in motor cycling and road safety education.

Another issue is disabled motor cycling. It may be a difficult image to picture, but some disabled people thoroughly enjoy motor cycling and, in common with disabled people with motor cars, might need a small change to their machine—a different gear lever, clutch or brake. It is disgraceful and discriminatory that the Motability scheme is not extended to motor cycles. The excuse given by the trustees is that it is hard to find engineering firms of sufficient depth and calibre to sustain the necessary amendment to motor cycles. I can say categorically that that is simply not the case. Our group has evidence of engineers who have carried out marvellous adaptations to motor cycles and many disabled motor cyclists can now enjoy their sport and use their machines for transport. Will the Minister examine Motability further? It is unfair that people who choose to travel on two wheels cannot access a scheme that people on four wheels can. That anomaly must be investigated further.

Another issue of unfairness—I am sorry if my speech sounds like a catalogue of complaints, but the motor cycling community wants me to press these problems—is the fact that VAT is payable on compulsory, but not optional, training and safety equipment. People need higher and more competent riding skills and they need the best protective equipment to minimise any injuries. Will the Minister examine the merit of a fiscal regime that does not provide incentives to acquire the safest equipment?

Vehicle excise duty, which I realise is not a matter for the Minister, is another issue. We will press the Chancellor to encourage the use of powered two-wheelers. Vehicle excise duty has proved effective at encouraging people into smaller cars, so it might also be used as an incentive to get people out of their cars and on to two wheels.

The work done by the advisory group is good news and I am delighted at the progress that has been made. A whole section of the report deals with diesel spillage, in respect of which it would be good to make even faster progress. *Motorcycle News* recently organised a petition—and secured 50,000 signatures—for amendments to be made to the filling caps of heavy goods vehicles to prevent diesel from spilling out. It is amazing how many road accidents occur not as a result of any faults on the part of motor cyclists or car drivers, but because diesel has spilt out of heavy goods vehicles as they negotiate a roundabout. In those circumstances, motor cycles often skid, which can lead to nasty accidents.

I am aware of a new directive on changing tank caps and firmly closing the seal. The advisory group's report stated:

> "At a date to be decided DETR will be consulting on the implementation of similar requirements for HGVs."

Will the Minister ensure that consultation takes place, so that he takes into account the views of people with practical experience of what it has meant to them when they have had a nasty crash and have been injured? It is a simple way to reduce the number of casualties from motor cycles.

Finally, I make a plea to car drivers. Motor cycles are often paraded as a dangerous form of transport that is predominantly used by young men and, sometimes, older men—I think that they are called born-again bikers—who have accidents with huge numbers of casualties. However, many motor cycle accidents are caused by car drivers who did not see the motor cyclist coming. Such drivers may turn right out of a junction without looking or seeing the bike. There will be a crash and, usually, the motor cyclist comes off worst in the accident. I plead for much better training for car drivers to make them more aware of the problems, because motor cyclists are blamed too often when it is not their fault. All people who use the roads, using vehicles such as cars, goods vehicles, motor cycles, mopeds and cycles—cyclists are a very important group—have a responsibility to work together when using the roads, and I believe that we can live harmoniously. I am delighted that the Government have taken the matter of motor cycling seriously.

There are a million motor cyclists out there, and I tell the Minister, in encouragement—he has had a tough time in the past couple of weeks, since we were involved in a slip of a tongue in the Chamber—that bikers are voters too and, if it all gets really tough, he can always get on his bike and go.

1.16pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) on securing the debate. She is, of course, the chair of the all-party motor cycling group. I also thank her for her courtesy in giving me notice of some of the detailed matters that she wished to raise in debate. I reassure her that I will study the *Official Report* and that I shall respond in writing, where appropriate, to questions asked in her speech that I am unable to deal with in my ensuing remarks. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) for his important intervention—he is, of course, a vice-chair of the all-party group.

Before I turn to the substance of my reply, I take the opportunity to clear up a deeply unfortunate misunderstanding that arose between my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and myself on 24 April, as a result of which I wrote to her saying:

> "I now understand that a remark I made today from the dispatch box at DETR Questions has been open to misinterpretation. My intention had been to describe you as 'Blears the Biker' in recognition of your role as a champion of the interests of motorcyclists. I very much regret that the phrase I used, entirely innocently and inadvertently, may have had offensive connotations and, as you know, I have apologised to you directly for my mistake."

I thought it right to place that apology on the public record, so that there should be no stain on the character of my hon. Friend.

The Government decided, at an early stage, to take a positive approach to motor cycling, and to work constructively with the industry to resolve potential difficulties. Our 1998 White Paper on the future of transport set out our position on motor cycling as part of an integrated transport policy. It recognised that powered two-wheelers have an important contribution to make, as did our 10-year transport plan, which was published last year. The White Paper acknowledged that mopeds and motor cycles can provide an alternative means of transport for many trips, and recognised that where public transport is limited and walking is

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unrealistic, motor cycling can provide an affordable alternative to the car that brings benefits to the individual and widens their employment opportunities.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hill: Very briefly, because I have much to say and little time in which to say it.

Mr. Sheerman: It would be sad if the Minister placed his remarks on the record without acknowledging that motor cycling is a very dangerous form of transport. When I entered the House, 1,000 young men a year riding motor cycles were killed on British roads, and it is an advantage that we have cut down the number of young people riding motor cycles without training. We already see an upward curve in motor cycle deaths, in many cases of men and women in their 30s. Motor cycling is a seriously dangerous mode of transport, and its safety should not be likened to that of the car.

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I hope to address the safety issue.

The role of motor cycling raises important and complex issues. For that reason we have established an advisory group on motor cycling, as my hon. Friend the Member for Salford said, to discuss key issues, including safety and the environment. The group involves a broad range of interested parties, including those who ride powered two-wheelers. That has helped the Government to move motor cycling policy forward and to define the role of motor cycles in our transport strategy. Last month, we published an interim report on the group's work and I can confirm that the Government intend to publish a motor cycling strategy in 2003.

One of the first things that we recognised was that successive Governments had failed to take proper account of the needs of motor cyclists. We have already done much to remedy that. In March 2000, we published guidance on local transport plans for local authorities, which said that authorities should take account of the contribution that powered two-wheelers can make in delivering integrated transport policies and consider specific measures to help motor cyclists in making integrated journeys. We asked local authorities to consider specific issues, including the provision of appropriate parking for motor cycles and the provision of good access, suitable facilities and secure parking at public transport interchanges. We asked them to remedy deficiencies in the road surface that affect motor cyclists, and to be aware of the role that powered two-wheelers can play in remote or rural areas.

I note with interest my hon. Friend's proposal that local authorities make efforts to involve motor cyclists in their local transport planning. As she said, we have provided powers and money for local authorities. The Transport Act 2000 gave them specific powers to provide secure parking facilities for motor cycles. In November, we announced £1 billion for local authorities to spend on maintenance over the next two years, which is double the amount of money now available. That will help to eliminate the potholes and bad surfacing that cause so many problems for motor cyclists and other road users.

The debate should not simply focus on what local authorities can do. The Highways Agency's safety plan takes motor cyclists into account and the maintenance plan recognises how important a contribution well-designed maintenance can make to road safety. Over the next few years, the United Kingdom will implement new European Union measures aimed at reducing fuel spillage, which represents another danger on the road surface.

The private sector has a role to play, too. We published guidance for businesses highlighting the space-efficient nature of powered two-wheelers and detailing the ways in which employers could help motor cyclists. Those include the provision of safe and secure parking, changing and storage locker facilities and safety training.

We are taking other steps to aid integration and traffic management. Several local authorities are active in increasing the amount of powered two-wheeler parking that they provide, but little technical guidance is available to those who need to take account of motor cycling in the public or private sectors. Therefore, we shall provide advice on various aspects of the planning and provision of parking facilities, including secure parking.

On a previous occasion, my hon. Friend raised the issue of congestion charging. I can now reinforce the reply that I gave her. The Government believe that powered two-wheelers should generally be exempt from road user charging and workplace parking schemes. We intend to leave decisions to local discretion but will publish guidance for consultation in the summer. Some local authorities allow motor cycles into bus lanes, but to date no proper monitoring or evaluation of that practice has taken place. A thorough examination of the traffic and safety implications for motor cyclists and other road users is required to enable us to draw proper conclusions. Therefore, we have approached several highway authorities that are interested in the possibility of allowing powered two-wheelers into bus lanes, with a view to participating in fully monitored trials over the next year or two.

We recognise that mopeds and motor cycles are being used in an effort to beat congestion, and people have argued that, if more trips were made by powered two-wheelers rather than car, less congestion would result because they take up less road space. A project is under way to consider the impact of powered two-wheeler use on congestion. That will help us to answer questions on the effects that increased motor cycling will produce.

I am confident that all those initiatives will better integrate motor cycling into our transport system but other, perhaps more difficult issues and challenges for motor cycling remain. The safety of motor cyclists is a significant issue for the Government. Motor cyclists represent a large proportion of road casualties in relation to their numbers. Our most recent figures—for 1999—show that there were 10 per cent. more deaths among two-wheeled vehicle users than in the previous year. Although it is true that the casualty rate shows a welcome fall of about 9 per cent., motor cyclists remain our most vulnerable road users.

We must deal with the problem. In March 2000, we published a road safety strategy for the next 10 years. It sets casualty reduction targets to be achieved by 2010, including a 40 per cent. reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured. Action is required to deliver such targets and we are already taking steps to implement the motor cycling package. Following consultation, we have recently introduced regulations that deliver several of the measures that we wanted and have removed those regulations that have had no helpful effect.

We have ended the unpopular "two years on, one year off" rule. From 1 February 2001, provisional licences will last until the age of 70, but people who do not pass a test within two years must remove their compulsory basic training certificate to continue riding. That is more appropriate than a ban, during which time a rider's skills may decline. In addition, the life of a CBT certificate has been reduced from three to two years. That achieves a sensible balance between providing learners with an incentive not to delay reaching test standard, while giving a reasonable period to accommodate individual circumstances.

Until recently, anyone passing a car test was granted a full moped licence without relevant training or testing. We believe, however, that riding a moped safely involves different skills from those needed to drive a car safely. Car drivers who qualify after 1 February 2001 will be required to complete a CBT course before using their moped entitlement to ride on the road. That will ensure that car drivers receive appropriate training before taking to two wheels.

The content of the car and motor cycle theory tests has changed and diverged. For example, the motor cycle test now better meets the needs of learner drivers than it did when it was introduced in 1996. To ensure that learners are tested properly for their mode of transport, the regulations provide that exemption from the motor cycle theory test for full car licence holders, and vice versa, is ended. We have ended that exemption.

Other measures are in the pipeline. We are developing pre-test rider training for all learner drivers, based on a range of competences to be achieved. It will be supported by training logbooks. To complement that, we shall be improving the standards of motor cycle instructors. That improvement will be supported by a voluntary register of accredited motor cycle instructors. In the longer term, we want to make that a statutory register. We want motor cycle instructors to be trained and tested to the same high standards that we propose for car instructors.

We are worried about the recent increase in casualties among older riders. We shall therefore develop guidance for full motor cycle licence holders who are turning to motor cycling after a break and for those taking to two wheels for the first time in later life. We want those riders to have a reliable source of training and refresher courses. We shall continue to promote improvements in engineering and technical standards, which could better protect motor cyclists. For example, my Department is leading a European collaborative research project, which we hope will lead to a new helmet standard in about five years.

The Government are also considering how to protect people who ride powered two-wheelers as part of their jobs—a point to which my hon. Friend referred. Initiatives are being pursued in partnership with industry, including the development of agreed codes of practice for motor cycle couriers and for fast food home delivery operators, and improved rider training with national standards for training schemes. The Government understand that motor cycle safety is not only a matter for the rider. Bad or inconsiderate driving by people in cars and other vehicles is a significant factor. Through training and testing, we want to make drivers more aware of the vulnerability of riders.

We shall be introducing hazard perception testing for all test candidates during the autumn of 2002. That will test the ability of a driver or rider to identify at the earliest possible opportunity situations that might require them to take some form of avoiding action, such as a change of speed or direction. We shall certainly have video clips showing motor cyclists.

I hope that my remarks demonstrate that we have taken great strides to move forward motor cycling policy and to take account of the needs of motor cyclists. The Government talk to motor cycling interests regularly and reflect on what is said before developing policy. There is still much to do, but with the help of the advisory group, the Government will see through the initiatives that I have described, and others, to develop good and well thought out policies. We continue to see powered two-wheelers as important in our transport strategy and remain committed to their safe use on our roads.

Thames Waste Management Ltd.

1.29 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I am grateful to the Speaker for selecting this debate. Thames Waste Management Ltd. applied for a permit to run an incinerator plant under the integrated pollution control regime in July 2000. The Environment Agency granted the permit in April 2001.

The application could never have been made if the Government had introduced the new directive on incinerators, the integrated pollution prevention and control regime, by October 1999, the deadline set across the European Union. By delaying the introduction of the new regime until the end of July 2000, the Government—inadvertently, of course—allowed Thames Waste Management Ltd. to sneak in its application under the old rules.

Given that they are the old rules, however, having obtained the permit does not entitle Thames Waste to burn a single tonne of waste in Guildford. Even if it gains planning permission for the plant, it will have to go through the whole procedure again to go ahead. By having the licence granted, Thames Waste has been given a spurious legitimacy for its speculative proposals for an incinerator plant in Guildford.

I come here on rather a busy day for politics. I am sure that incinerators, although important, will not be at the top of the minds of most of the country's people. However, I have come here to represent the entire community of Guildford, which is of one mind on the issue. It is concerned that the Government focus on the matter in the short time available before the Parliament dissolves. I have been in this place for four years, and do not expect contrition from the Minister, but I do hope for his co-operation. That is why I have let him know several of the points that I am about to raise.

We do not believe that an out-of-date permission should be allowed to give a spurious legitimacy to a planning application that still has to be resolved. The county council has indicated that it does not regard it as providing that legitimacy, but the authority provided by the Government's view would help to make it clear to all that the fact that the licence has been granted does not give any edge to the applicant's planning proposal.

We have also learned, through our examination of the matter, not only that the opportunity to apply for a licence should not have arisen, but that the Environment Agency should not have granted the licence. I refer the Minister to paragraph 22 of planning policy guidance note 10 on the Environment Agency, which, clearly states:

> "Where a waste management licence is sought...for which planning permission is required, planning approval has to be obtained before the Agency can grant a licence, unless the waste management facility is regulated through the integrated pollution control"

regime.

In the case under discussion, we all knew that, although the applicant could obtain an IPC licence, it would not be regulated at any point through the IPC regime. It is now absolutely clear that it will have to be regulated through a new regime. Surely, therefore, it is a breach of the Government's planning guidelines for the Environment Agency to issue such a licence before the planning issues have been resolved.

The only alternative explanation is that the Government might have delayed updating planning policy guidance note 10 to take account of the new situation because it is their intention that all planning applications should have the appropriate Environment Agency licence. If that is their position, there will be a knock-on effect for this proposal, which now has the benefit of a licence, albeit an obsolete one. By comparison, the procedure has not yet been fulfilled for other applications, for other sites in Surrey. Under the planning guidance, no licences should be yet offered under the new regime. That goes to the heart of the matter on which we need clarification from the Minister.

In the course of our inquiries, we came up with a third issue—that, according to a written reply that I received from the Department, a new, more stringent regime is to be imposed by the end of next year. What is important about that new regime is that the public will have to be consulted not only on the planning process, but on the permit process on the granting of the environmental licence. One reason why people in Guildford are dismayed by the whole process is that the Environment Agency, despite receiving a record number of objections—more than 10,000 letters to the agency and more than 25,000 letters to both the agency and the county council—has undertaken no public consultation during its consideration of the licence proposal. Under the new regime that is to be brought in by the end of next year—we have a Government commitment on that—such a public consultation would be necessary and would provide an opportunity to deal with the many concerns that people have about such incinerators.

The whole process has been mishandled in three ways—first, in the failure to bring in new directives in time; secondly, in determining an application in contradiction to Government guidelines; and, thirdly, in view of the fact that more stringent rules are around the corner. That reinforces the call for a moratorium on all new incinerators that is being made by my party and my community. Communities throughout the country want a moratorium. We can then sort out the health risks, impose the more stringent requirements and undertake a strategic Government review of the need for such incinerators, given that so many people are now awake to their risks and would rather put more effort into the preferred alternative of recycling.

I received a letter from Burpham community association that pointed me towards the recent report of the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, which I am sure that the Minister has studied in detail. Paragraph 93 of the report states that

> "it is generally accepted that emission standards are still based on what can be measured and what is technologically achievable, rather than what is safe."

It continues:

> "The Environment Agency told us, more generally, that our understanding of the health effects of air pollution is 'at an early stage.'"

For all those reasons, there is a strong case for allowing communities such as the one that I represent to pursue alternatives such as recycling and to wait for the more stringent requirements of the new regulations to come into force before allowing a single further incinerator to be approved in this country.

I am grateful to the leader of our local campaign, the Guildford anti-incinerator network, the Reverend Colin Matthews, who has pointed out more generally in the context of the Environment Agency's performance over this application:

> "The Environment Agency appears to be entirely on the polluters' side. It has never refused a licence even though it knows no incinerator has kept within the pollution limits set for it."

Indeed, in evidence to the Committee's inquiry, the Environment Agency admitted that even the latest generation of post-1996 incinerators has caused nearly 900 fugitive, unlawful emissions from plants in the short period that those incinerators have been in operation. This morning, when I visited the plant operated by Thames Waste Management Ltd. at Thamesmead, its managers had to admit that these emissions are happening and that there is no way in which they can guarantee that such fugitive emissions can be avoided.

We should therefore like a statement in this debate or an undertaking to write as soon as possible—preferably before Parliament dissolves—to the planning authority of Surrey county council. What is the status of the licence that has been granted? Why have the Government delayed implementing the current rules, which would have prevented the application happening in the first place? Why has the Environment Agency approved the licence in contradiction of the current planning guidelines? In view of the new rules that the Government have undertaken to introduce within the next 18 months, how far should the planning authority take into account the new requirements, which include a requirement for public consultation on environmental implications? I notice that the Minister is nodding his head, and I should be grateful for his co-operation on those points.

In the short time left to me, I should like to raise several planning issues that surround the application. It is evident that the application is a departure from both the local plan in Guildford and the structure plan for Surrey. The local plan requires any planning application to take into account its impact on the landscape and character of the town. How can a structure bigger and taller than Guildford cathedral possibly be in tune with the design, layout, history and character of our historic market town? How can it be right that an applicant can ride roughshod over normal planning guidelines because it says that it must deal with waste in that way?

We know that there is a local will, and the means on that site, to assist a massive increase in recycling. I shall be the first to admit that towns such as Guildford can do a great deal more to recycle. Indeed, if there is one benefit of the process, it has been the wake-up call to our community, and to others, that we must do a great deal more to recycle our waste to minimise the requirement for incinerators. An opportunity for recycling would, of course, be generated by a moratorium on incinerators, which would give communities a chance to prove how much more they can do.

I should like to draw the Minister's attention to the wider issue of the loss of amenity. Section 41 of PPG10 states:

> "The effects of waste management facilities"

must be considered in the context of

> "proximity to other developments, impacts on amenity".

In the context of telecommunications masts, it is now accepted that the impact on amenity of a mast and concerns generated in a local community are valid planning considerations. If, for example, a mast is proposed next to a school, the fact that its erection might cause the numbers at the school to fall because parents would withdraw their children, which could mean that the school, nursery or other community facility would have to close, is now, according the Government's latest guidelines, a valid planning consideration. By the same token, is the enormous concern generated by a proposal in a town such as the one that I represent a valid planning consideration? Are the effects on local services, schools and businesses near the proposed plant valid planning considerations?

Only the other day, I visited a major international company, Regus, the office providers, which has built a new suite of offices for businesses in Guildford. Along with other leading companies such as Ericsson and Colgate Palmolive, it is concerned by the impact that the proposal will have on its staff, on their willingness to move to the town and, of course, on other facilities in Guildford. If the impact on amenity applies in the case of a telecommunications mast, surely it should apply in this case.

The announcement that the agency had approved a licence for a giant incinerator in Guildford was a scandal. We would not be in the position that we are in today if the Government had introduced the new rules and the Environment Agency had followed the current planning rules. As I said, the company will have to go through the whole procedure again before it can progress with its proposals.

The affair highlights the need for a moratorium, and the need to give alternatives such as recycling the chance to take root and prove themselves in communities such as the one that I represent. Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister rejected my call for a moratorium. The message to the people of Guildford is that the Government do not realise the issue's importance. The Minister has an opportunity to put that right now and to respond constructively to the points that I have made.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) on securing a debate on the licensing of a proposed incinerator in Guildford, and thank him for making us aware of some of the questions to which he would like an answer. That is most helpful, and I shall try to answer as many of them as possible. I recognise that the issue is attracting considerable public interest in his constituency.

In July 2000, Thames Waste Management Ltd. submitted a planning application to Surrey county council and a concurrent application to the Environment Agency concerning a proposed integrated waste management centre at Slyfield. Surrey county council will decide whether to grant planning permission for the proposed facility, which includes an energy-from-waste plant.

The plant will require planning permission and authorisation under the new integrated pollution prevention and control—IPPC—regime to be built and

[Mr. Robert Ainsworth]

operated. Planning permission and the granting of IPPC authorisation are two independent processes, which will take different considerations into account.

It would be improper for me to comment on the merits or otherwise of a planning application proposal. Any such comments could prejudice the Secretary of State's position, if the application should ultimately come to him for a decision. However, the hon. Gentleman has set out concerns about the licensing regime for the proposed plant and it will help if I give some background information on the subject.

Until the new IPPC regime comes into effect, large waste incinerators are regulated by the Environment Agency under the integrated pollution control—IPC—regime. Thames Waste Management made its original application to the Environment Agency in July 2000, before the new IPPC regime came into force. In April 2001, the Environment Agency granted authorisation to the proposal under the IPC regime.

The IPC authorisation issued by the Environment Agency does not allow the applicant to operate the incinerator. For the incinerator to operate, the applicant must apply for and obtain an IPPC permit. Should such an application be made, there will be a public consultation.

The IPPC regime 2000 for England and Wales came into force on 1 August 2000. Its basic purpose is to introduce a more integrated approach to controlling pollution. In a recent press release, Surrey county council acknowledged that the IPC does provide information to inform the planning process. Planning permission may be granted without IPPC authorisation if Surrey county council is satisfied with its examination of health and pollution issues surrounding the application. As I said, however, the plant will not be able to operate until it has been granted IPPC authorisation by the Environment Agency.

The Environment Agency considers that, provided that the applicant can demonstrate compliance with the additional requirements imposed under the IPPC regime, the principles of best practicable environmental option, air dispersion assessment and health risk assessment could be transposed into the new IPPC regulatory regime.

It might be useful if I make a few comments on the Government's general approach to waste.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Ainsworth: I should like to make progress because I know that the hon. Gentleman is anxious for me to place certain points on the record and answer his questions.

In May 2000 we published the national waste strategy, setting out the Government's policy for sustainable waste management for the next 20 years. The strategy identified the need for a step change in the way in which we think about the management of our waste. That will mean curbing the growth in waste, and learning to recognise waste as a resource. The Government are committed to dramatic increases in recycling and composting rates.

For the first time, the Government have set statutory targets for household waste recycling and composting, which will require councils, on average, to double recycling and composting by 2003-04 and almost triple it by 2005-06. We have set even higher targets for 2010 and 2015, which we shall keep under review and raise if to do so proves practical.

The key driver behind those goals is the European landfill directive, which will require substantial changes to the way in which we manage our waste. At present, the United Kingdom landfills more than 80 per cent. of its municipal waste. The directive will require substantial reductions in biodegradable municipal waste that is sent to landfill.

The national waste strategy provides a clear framework for decision making. The waste hierarchy, which is a key part of the decision-making process, makes it clear that waste should be eliminated where possible and that the potential for reuse and recycling should be maximised. However, where it does not make sense to recycle or compost waste, consideration should be given to the recovery of energy from waste.

Although the Government have no plans for a specific number of incinerators, they do not rule out their use as part of an integrated waste management plan. Some new incineration capacity might be required if we are to manage all the waste that is to be diverted from landfill in the next 20 years.

The proximity principle, which is another key consideration in taking waste management decisions, advises that in general, waste should be managed as near as possible to its place of production, given that transporting waste has an environmental impact. Dealing with waste in that way is generally preferable to exporting it elsewhere, although the best practicable environmental option for certain wastes—normally those that are especially hazardous or toxic—might be to transport them to facilities that are designed to deal with them. Ultimately, the choice of waste facilities is a matter for local councils, in consultation with local communities.

In determining the application, I am confident that Surrey county council will consider all relevant issues. In particular, it will need to take into account representations from the local community, and the guidance for local planning authorities and others involved in the development process as set out in planning policy guidance note 10, "Planning and Waste Management", and planning policy guidance note 23, "Planning and Pollution Control".

In a plan-led system, consideration of the siting of major waste management facilities begins with waste planning authorities preparing their local waste plans. The plans set out the authorities' policies and proposals for dealing with waste in their areas, and should include the identification of sites for any new or extended facilities that might be required. It is important that the public become involved in this process, so that they can be fully informed about future development and use of land in their areas.

I fully appreciate that local people may have concerns about the proposed development of an energy-from-waste plant in Surrey. Representations from local people will be one factor that Surrey county council must take into account when determining the application. However, modern energy-from-waste plants are strictly regulated by the Environment Agency according to the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The environmental performance of waste incinerators has improved immensely since the early 1990s.

The hon. Gentleman said that he believes that the application was dealt with in a manner contrary to the guidance in planning policy guidance note 10. Under IPPC, Thames Waste Management Ltd. would have had to apply for planning permission before applying for a permit from the Environment Agency. By applying under IPC, it was deliberately avoiding that requirement. In fact, the situation under IPPC will remain the same as under IPC, in that planning permission will not be needed in order to apply for either permit. To have waited for IPPC to come into force would have made no difference, except that it is likely to involve a lengthier process.

The hon. Gentleman also said that it is not normal to do business by seeking IPC, or IPPC, approval prior to planning permission. However, I am afraid that it is quite common for companies to deal with matters in such a way and it does not detract from the requirements of the planning process that must be undergone subsequently. It also means that the IPPC regime will still have to be taken into consideration before the plant can operate.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Paragraph 22 of PPG10 says that where a licence is sought, planning approval must first be obtained unless the facility is regulated through the IPC regime. Is the Minister saying that that exemption will be extended when the planning guidance is revised to include the IPPC regime and that, therefore, the Government's policy is that companies should apply for the environmental licence and have a decision taken on the licence before the planning process is completed?

Mr. Ainsworth: It will disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I will repeat what I have already said. Under the IPPC, the situation will remain the same as it is under the IPC. The company will not need planning permission to apply for either permit and it will make no difference to have waited for the IPPC to come into effect, except that the IPPC is a lengthier process.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The Minister is not answering my point that we are not simply concerned about whether an applicant applies for a licence, but about whether it is granted. Locally, people feel that the grant of an environmental licence in some way prejudges the planning process. The application allows the Environment Agency to examine the issues, but it should not issue its final determination of the licence until the planning process is completed. Perhaps the Minister will write to me on that point.

Mr. Ainsworth: I will come back to the hon. Gentleman if I can and if subsequent inquiries throw up anything that differs from the comments that I have made. It is normal for companies to apply for licences from the Environment Agency first because that agency is statutorily bound to issue or refuse a permit within four months. A planning process may take much longer. There is an incentive for companies to carry out business that way round, and they often do. That is contrary to what the hon. Gentleman believes to be case. If I subsequently discover that what he says has some relevance, I will contact him.

The Government welcome the recent adoption of the EU waste incineration directive, which reinforces the already tough emission standards under domestic legislation.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I assume that we have a few minutes left. I also raised the point about a departure from the local and structure plans. We do not expect the Minister to comment on that individual application, but it will be considered alongside other applications, at least one of which will receive an automatic consideration by the Minister as to whether there should be a public inquiry, because it is in the green belt. It has been said of both the other applications that they are departures from the plan. Will the Minister take an even-handed approach to those applications, which are considered at the same time and all of which are, in various ways, significant departures from the local and structure plans? Does he consider that they should be called in or be the subject of a public inquiry?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman knows that if there is a departure from the plan, the proposal is flagged up to be potentially called in. If an application is turned down, applicants have an automatic right to appeal against it. Even if a proposal is within the plan, that does not preclude the matter from being called in. Considerations such as whether the application has an impact wider than that on the local area and whether there has been conformity to the plan must be taken into account. Without prejudicing any future decision taken by the Secretary of State, I cannot go much further than that in helping the hon. Gentleman.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 9 May 2001

[MR. MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

People's Peers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Kevin Hughes.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise the issue of the so-called people's peers and the future of the House of Lords. Some of the usual suspects are in attendance and I extend a welcome to them, especially to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan). They are in their final days in the House of Commons and have consistently promoted a democratic Parliament in the United Kingdom, a democratic Parliament that is denied to the people of our country. I look forward to their contributions to the debate.

I want to focus my remarks on the absolute absurdity—the nonsense, the charade—that surrounded the announcement a little more than a week ago of the so-called people's peers. Prophetically, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) said that it would again open up the debate about the future of the House of Lords—and how right he was. I hope that this morning's debate will be a further nail in the coffin of that wholly illegitimate Chamber.

Having said that, it is with some pride that I show visitors around the building. I take them to the House of Lords and say how improper that Chamber is, but I then pause and say, "However, its functions are extremely important." One of the great challenges to us in the United Kingdom when trying to argue for constitutional change is to build in ratchets against arbitrary government. Lord Hailsham referred to our constitution as facilitating parliamentary dictatorship. All too often, we have seen how both Conservative and Labour Governments railroad through legislation without its having received sufficient scrutiny. The statute at the end of sausage machine is flawed. It is bad law. We have inadequate opportunities to check and probe the Executive, so much of whose work is done without a mandate from Parliament, but under the royal prerogative.

I am someone who unashamedly believes in bicameralism. There is an important function to be fulfilled in the Chamber that is currently occupied by the House of Lords. Its membership is "unlawful" and I look forward to the day when a totally elected democratic Chamber, with legitimate Members who have individual mandates, replaces it. I chose to be on the left of politics. I am a socialist. The history of our party has been one of trying to do away with that Chamber, yet I find it deeply disappointing, as do Labour party activists throughout the country, that we have failed to abolish the House of Lords and, as far as I am aware, it is not our intention to do away with it, or even to replace it with an elected Chamber called the House of Lords. The position is to sustain the illicit situation in which the House is filled by a substantial number of hereditary peers and those who are appointed by the patronage of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Liberal Democrats and the fig leaf of nonsense of so-called people's peers.

I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary tell us what our stance will be over the next four weeks on the House of Lords, which will be interesting. I remind him of our stance four years ago. We made it abundantly clear—it was unequivocal, not conditional—that

> "A committee of both Houses of Parliament will be appointed to undertake a wide-ranging review of possible further change"—

to the House of Lords—

> "and then to bring forward proposals for reform."

We did not fulfil that commitment. We reneged on it and appointed a royal commission instead. No mention was made in our manifesto of a royal commission. Royal commissions involve the great and good and the glitterati—the safe hands who constitute that cosy magic circle that runs the country whether the Government is Conservative or Labour. We fell into the chasm of merely doing what others have done, which I find deeply disappointing.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The suggestion that I feel part of the current establishment is far removed from reality. Watching the Prime Minister on television yesterday, as he went to his school in Bermondsey, I realised that I was living on a completely different planet from him.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am talking about the House of Lords. If someone wants to divert to a completely different subject, so be it. I hope that it has not escaped the hon. Gentleman's attention that, although the debate may be adversarial, it is between a Labour Member and a Labour Minister. In a sense, the hon. Gentleman is trespassing on a matter that is none of his business, as we are in government and it looks as though we shall be there for a long time to come. Such diversions are irrelevant. The hon. Gentleman should focus on arguing for a change in the culture in this country—the magic circle in a class-ridden society, that narrow group that runs and takes all the decisions in this country, especially in relation to the House of Lords, which is the subject of this morning's debate. We have reinforced the hereditary element in the House for Lords for decades to come, and we have reinforced the system of prime ministerial patronage. I find that entirely unacceptable.

I invite the House to consider, human nature being what it is, what Prime Minister or leader of the Conservative or Liberal party would appoint to the House of Lords someone who is bloody-minded, an irritant or a nuisance or who takes a different view from himself. I shall not name the person involved, but I have often heard people with a different view from that of a particular important person referred to as neanderthal. People who will ruffle feathers are never, and will never be, nominated.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

The system is flawed. I look forward to hearing from the representative of the Liberal Democrats, as I understand—I acknowledge some credit—that the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy), who leads the party, and the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown) have at least created in their party machine a quasi-democratic system whereby the membership can throw up nominees whom the leader of the party might consider nominating for appointment to the House of Lords. If that is so, it is something. That certainly does not happen in the Labour party. I oppose appointment by the Prime Minister or the leader of the Labour party, but, so long as it exists, I should have thought that, within the Labour party and, for that matter, the principal opposition party, there should be some facility for panels nominated from the grass roots of the party, from whom the leader might select people for ennoblement. However, there is not. The matter of who is preferred is left exclusively in the hands of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. That is entirely unacceptable.

Each of us has been privileged to go abroad to represent Parliament and, perhaps, to lecture students or other parliamentarians in the fragile or emerging democracies of the world about parliamentary democracy. What arrogance we have, when we cannot see the beam in our own eye—when half our Parliament is unelected and illegitimate and has no mandate. We have the audacity to go abroad and talk about parliamentary democracy. Can my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary not see how absurd that is? It is time to mobilise the next Labour parliamentary party, with some vigour, to demand of the next Labour Government radical change in our parliamentary arrangements—to rid ourselves of this House of Lords by sweeping it away with a democratically elected second Chamber.

The nonsense of the people's peers has prompted this debate. Did you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that applicants were vetted by PricewaterhouseCoopers? We could avoid the next four weeks by sending our applications to that company. If the machinery for gauging what is representative or what may constitute a microcosm of the nation is so sophisticated, we could save a lot of time and effort. That is what happened, and that lovely company drew up the shortlist with Lord Stevenson and his Appointments Commission. Lord Stevenson has done a great service to the cause by showing his enormous snobbery, abysmal ignorance and insensitivity and by demonstrating that he is totally disqualified from selecting anyone. His utterance is no matter for levity; it is important. When examined about the absurdity of the 15 nominees that his commission had thrown up, he said:

> "You haven't got your hairdresser in this list, but if you go back to our criteria one of them is that the human being will be comfortable operating in the House of Lords."

I find that amazing, and, of course, deeply insulting to the overwhelming majority in this country, some of whom fell for the lie that somehow, if they put in a reasoned application, they might be considered for membership of the House of Lords.

I am opposed to the lottery, and I counsel people never to buy a ticket because I see so many people seduced by the dream that somehow they might come up trumps. This is the middle class equivalent. I am sure that all hon. Members knew people who asked, "Will you give me a reference, because I am applying to the House of Lords Appointments Commission?" I told them, "Don't bother. It's an absurdity. It isn't going to happen. You're not going to get a look in." Those people are immensely able and would be capable of serving the House of Commons with distinction, but I knew that the appointments would be a farce and that they would not get a look in. However, they dreamed that they might get in, and they are deeply angry and hurt by the process and by Lord Stevenson's comments.

Let us look at the people who have been thrown up by the appointments process. The general view is that, under the existing process, many could have got to the House of Lords, and were probably already anointed to go there. They applied, and I am most unhappy about some of them, looking at their individual qualities. They signed up to get into the political arena. Politics is not a kid-gloved affair. It is deeply worrying that Sir Paul Condon, who was, to say the least, a very unsuccessful Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, should be nominated, especially as one of the criteria for selection was that applicants should have been very successful in their professional life and in the contribution that they had made.

If we examine *Private Eye* this week—and it is always useful to have a copy on these occasions—we see an important column relating to Valerie Howarth, who has been nominated to be a people's peer. The article tells us that she is the chief executive of the telephone charity Childline, and goes on to say:

> "There was a time when Ms Howarth's dreams of being admitted to the ranks of the great and good seemed to have been dashed for once and for all. In 1984 she was director of social services in the London borough of Brent when a four-year-old girl in the council's care, Jasmine Beckford, was battered to death by her stepfather. Although she was cleared by the subsequent inquiry she was disciplined by Brent council, and given a written warning for not taking greater personal responsibility in the case.
>
> The following year, Miss Howarth applied for and secured the post of social services director at Cambridgeshire county council, but omitted to mention the Beckford case in her interview. When it came to light the job offer was withdrawn."

Will the Minister tell us whether that matter was revealed in the application made by Valerie Howarth? If it were, I should have thought that she would be disqualified, because demonstrably she was not an outstanding person in terms of her career. If the matter was not disclosed, the application was flawed. What is the mechanism for disqualifying people who have not made their application for the job in question—as with any job—with appropriate candour, and disclosed facts material to an appointment? Parliament should be told.

Frankly, Lord Stevenson of Coddenham should revisit the appointment. I assume that, over the next 12 months, it is unlikely that Royal Assent will be given to a Bill that I would like and that would abolish the House of Lords or, perhaps, abandon the absurd experiment and silly idea of people's peers. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary should tell us this morning that the business of the Appointments Commission, which I understand was dealt with by the Cabinet Office or Prime Minister, will be revisited in time for next year. Alternatively, I should like my hon. Friend to say that the experiment will be abandoned—he may not use that word, but I will take a nod and a wink from him that the matter will be quietly forgotten and lost. We cannot go through the procedure again because it is offensive to applicants, a snub to the people of the United Kingdom and acutely embarrassing to the Labour party and the Prime Minister. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is a great man, for whom I have great and deep affection. However, the people's peers was not his best idea.

I am being unfair to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, because I think that the people's peers were not his idea, but that of some people whose names we know not, who are in 10 Downing street or policy think tanks, and who are unaccountable to this place. I hope that my right hon. Friend will learn from this episode that the focus group to which he should listen is the parliamentary Labour party, which—I suspect, like my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary—does not believe in such nonsense in its heart of hearts.

Is it true that when my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and I were parliamentary candidates, and during his long time in the Labour party, he rightly expressed scorn for the House of Lords? Did he not believe in doing away with that House altogether, or replacing it with a democratically elected House? It would be interesting to know that, because we would then know that in the heart of Government we have somebody who is advocating the view that will be reflected this morning.

I have said that it is wholly unacceptable that membership of the House of Lords should be subject to the patronage of the leaders of the principal political parties. People who are appointed have no mandate. There are some very good people, some of whom I am very fond of and who, contrary to their better judgment, have some regard for me. However, their membership of that House is not legitimate.

There are other serious problems that should be addressed with expedition. When a person is appointed as a life peer, he or she may well be able in body and in mind, and may be so for the next 10, 20, or 25 years. However, in that job there is no exit, other than going to the great parliamentary chamber on high, and seeing the great general secretary up there; such people must continue.

The matter is serious, but sensitive, and not uttered here because it is sensitive. I wish to deal with it with utmost delicacy. Some of the peers are past it, and some who are at such a stage are desperate to give up. However, the party Whips in the House of Lords scurry around putting leverage on them to come; they put leverage on the loved ones of those in the House of Lords to persuade them to come—in body, if not, in some cases, in mind. That is absurd. I have seen American tourists come down from the House of Lords Gallery in a state of total bewilderment. They cannot believe that it is a parliamentary Chamber—they have seen Gilbert and Sullivan.

How long can we go on like this? The least that should be done in a short Bill is to allow members of the House of Lords to abandon that House while perhaps keeping their titles. A credit may remain with the political party so that the arithmetic that is apparently so important is maintained. I know that there is a system through which one can decline to apply for a writ, but that is not adequate. People should be given the opportunity to say, "No further."

The red chamber in Canada has a cut-off point in the mid-70s for its members. That is correct, so long as the House is unelected; when there are direct elections, it will be for the people to decide. I have always said that. There is a senator in the United States who is pushing 100—and so be it, as the people of his state are comfortable with that. I am not ageist in that I do not think that an age limit should be set on a democratic Parliament but, so long as the House is unelected, there should be a cut-off point or an exit for those people. In many cases, their families would like them to retire with some dignity—and I use that word deliberately. There are some sad members in the House of Lords who are losing their dignity but are being abused by the party political system and the Whips.

The rapid appointment of a large number of peers debases that parliamentary Chamber even more, and makes it an absurdity. It is far too large. My hope is that we might have a relatively small democratically elected Chamber, numbering perhaps 150, elected on a regional proportional representation list. There should not be big bang elections; there should be a fixed term, so that no opportunity exists for premature dissolution. A third of the members should retire in rotation.

People who oppose my idea say, "Mackinlay, we must not create anything that challenges the House of Commons." That is nonsense, because when we reorganise our constitution we can write in bold letters in the statute and paint on everyone's eyelids that the House of Commons is supreme and its view will prevail. The statute may also reiterate that the House of Lords has no responsibility for supply, so we do not have the problems that bedevilled Gough Whitlam in Australia in 1975. That Chamber should fulfil the existing functions of scrutiny and frustration—it should frustrate sometimes by delay. It should also do the important job of review.

The House of Lords should be elected, however. If it were elected on a fixed-term basis, with a third retiring every so often, every member would have legitimacy, but the Chamber as a whole would not have a mandate to frustrate the democratically elected will of the people's popular House, which would remain the House of Commons. That is the sensible way forward. We also need to get rid of the Cross Benchers, bishops and Law Lords. Under the electoral system that I propose, it would be possible for independents to get elected. That would put the political parties on their mettle. There would be a level playing field.

Under the system that I propose, the people who had no mandate to represent anyone but themselves would be gone. The absurdity of one particular denomination being represented in a parliamentary Chamber would be gone, but not added to by designating a number of seats for the Roman Catholics, the Methodists, the Pentecostals or whatever. We should be a secular Parliament. To use the biblical phrase, "Render unto Caesar all that is Caesar's and unto God all that is God's." Christ was clear about that division of responsibility. He prophesied our ideal constitutional arrangements 2,000 years ago. There should be a cut-off point. People who represent religions should not be

[Mr. Mackinlay]

given seats in the parliamentary Chamber: they may be religious, but they should not be in Parliament for that reason.

Yesterday, I tackled the Minister about another matter that could be expeditiously resolved. It is nonsense that senior Ministers can sit in the House of Lords while legislation for which they are responsible is piloted through the House of Commons. Questions about their Bills are answered at the Dispatch Box by junior Ministers who, in some cases, do not know the subject. They will pretend that they know about the matter by working from a brief, but they have no mandate to reassure hon. Members who make valid points and try to improve the legislation.

That situation is a charade, and it also increasingly happens the other way around. There are delightful people in the other place called Lords-in-waiting who play the role of jobbing Ministers by merely working from briefs: they are utility players who perform a variety of duties and pretend that they know what they are talking about when they do not. It is nonsense.

A modest reform could be expeditiously introduced. Ministers who are the architects and pilots of particular pieces of legislation should promote and defend them in both Houses. Other Westminster-style constitutions allow that to happen. I would invite Ministers who sit in the House of Lords to take a seat on the Treasury Front Bench. However, if hon. Members feel sensitive about the matter, a little Dispatch Box could be erected at the Bar of the House, because it would make sense for such Ministers to be able to speak in both Houses.

Recent Conservative Governments have included two distinguished and able Ministers who sat in the House of Lords: Baroness Chalker held the overseas aid portfolio, and Lord Young was a Trade Minister in one of Margaret Thatcher's Administrations. It frustrates the House of Commons when Ministers sit in the House of Lords. There is a rumour that Lord Macdonald might be promoted to the Cabinet when the next Labour Government is appointed on 8 June 2001. He cannot stand for election because he is unable to quit being a Lord. There would be one hell of a row if a Labour Government were to appoint Members of the House of Lords to the Cabinet as Ministers with important portfolios. The House of Commons is the people's Chamber, but its elected Members would not be able to have direct access to those Ministers at Question Time or when legislation for which they were responsible was debated. If a Labour Government were to do that, it would stand on its head the party's criticism of Margaret Thatcher's appointment of Lord Young as a Minister.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary must address that issue. I hope that he agrees with my view about the implications if Lord Macdonald is awarded a senior portfolio. I also hope that he recognises that the reform that I have proposed is sensible and modest and that further great changes are necessary.

I apologise for detaining this Chamber, but I have now got something off my chest, and I feel better for it. If the Government wish to endure by winning a third term in office, they must fulfil the expectations of the Labour party activists who have struggled for real—rather than cosmetic—change in our institutions, who want to get rid of the class divisions that bedevil our society and who still occasionally sing the words

"It suits today the weak and base,
Whose minds are fixed on pelf and place;
To cringe beneath the rich man's frown,
And haul that sacred emblem down."

There are people in the Labour party who believe in change, and who might refer to themselves as socialists. There is also a larger body of people, spanning all political parties, who believe that the Parliament of which we are, in some ways, proud is also an anachronism, and they look to the next Labour Government to be radical and to reform the institution after the general election.

9.59 am

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who is a true friend, for raising the issue, especially as, at such a time, there are two categories of retiring Members of Parliament—those who know that they are retiring and those who have yet to find out. I hope that by 8 June I shall be in neither category, but this is an excellent moment to be debating the issue.

I suppose that, of all Members of Parliament, I should welcome the appointment of people's peers because they are Cross Benchers and will sit as independents. In a limited sense, therefore, I do welcome such appointments. However, I do not delight in the spectacle of the establishment selecting its own. I would like just one of those 15—or even two or three—to be somebody of whom I have never heard.

All hon. Members know many people of great and quiet distinction in their constituencies. Such people would, and could, have served admirably in the House of Lords. I find the suggestion that such people would not be comfortable in such elevated company absurd. It is a little bit like Army officers of the old school who objected to promotion through the ranks because a sergeant or warrant officer would not be comfortable in the officers' mess. That is nothing but arrant snobbery.

I should have thought that, of all Members of Parliament, the one least likely to accept a peerage if offered would be the hon. Member for Thurrock, and I think that I know why. Like me, he is a democrat, and he would not wish to be a member of an assembly that is so indiscriminate that one can buy one's way into it. The number of life peers as a percentage of the population is, I guess, 0.0000001 per cent. In terms of contributors to party funds in the coming election, however, I guess that at least 25 per cent. of them happen to be peers—in the case of the Conservative party, the percentage is probably even more. It is undeniable that that opens the door to corruption.

During one Prime Minister's Question Time, I made the point that peerages are bought and sold in this country on a greater scale than at any time since the days of Lloyd George. In doing so, I managed to offend the Government and the Opposition, and I drew the reproach of the Liberal Democrat leader, who did not like the disparagement of his great predecessor. It is clear, however, that we must find a different system, in which elevation cannot be bought. In this case, the

House of Lords reminds me a little of space travel—one can buy one's way up there. I am convinced that that should not be so.

I once voted for an amendment proposed by the hon. and learned Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews)—another real democrat who would never accept the golden shilling—which suggested bricking up the entrance of the House of Lords. It seemed to me that, if what we have is the best that we can do, we are probably better off without it. Patronage has been the curse of the British political system for 200 years—and it still is. However, we are now on the threshold of a general election and the almost certain re-election of the Labour party in vast numbers. Clearly, the House of Commons needs a different form of democracy—the Executive cannot continue to be as unchecked as they are. The House of Lords, for all its faults, provides some kind of a check. I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Thurrock that the time has come to democratise the other place.

We are governed by a Government of unfinished business, and no business is more unfinished that that of the reform of the House of Lords. When I joined this Chamber, rather accidentally, four years ago, I thought that I was joining the free Parliament of a free people, but it has some dismaying elements of a rubber-stamp assembly. In the next Parliament, we can and must do better, in the House of Lords and in this House.

10.3 am

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on raising the subject and on his speech. Not many Members take an interest in constitutional matters, but he has done so from the beginning. He has knowledge, commitment and passion. It is appropriate to discuss the subject now, because we are about to go into a general election—not, of course, for our Parliament, but for half our Parliament. Every hon. Member present, except me, will be seeking support on polling day. However, those who have just been appointed will be in the other place for life.

I shall address a point that is not often made: the establishment has a deep hostility towards democracy. It took me a long time to realise that the establishment and the powers that be—including the Prime Ministers of the day, whoever they may be—do not want a democratic challenge. That is maintained in a skilful way, which includes the use of the royal family for political purposes. The Queen depends on the Prime Minister for her popularity, and the Prime Minister depends on the Crown for his power. That said, the establishment is not so committed to individual monarchs that it is not prepared to sacrifice one to save the Crown, as it did with Edward VIII in 1936. The Crown is the core of the system.

People say that this country does not have a written constitution, but of course we do. Without wishing to bore hon. Members, I can recite the whole constitution:

> "I swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, her heirs and successors, according to law".

Every Member of the House, peer, Anglican minister and judge swears that oath. Privy Councillors swear an even worse one: they pledge to protect the Crown from foreign prelates, potentates and powers. Indeed, when the Privy Councillor's oath was read to me, I said that I had said nothing and agreed to nothing, but I was told that the oath had been administered. Until that moment, I did not realise that the administration of an oath was an injection.

Under the constitution, the Prime Minister of the day has enormous power. Every Prime Minister—I am not making this personal—uses that power for political purposes. They used to appoint hereditary peers, but now appoint life peers. The idea of people's peers was proposed, which involves a sort of extended patronage. A committee is appointed to appoint people who are described as people's peers, but the purpose is to maintain political power.

Another important theme is the corruption of the word "representative", which has two meanings. Every Member is a representative of his or her constituency. When we are in our constituencies, the bus drivers, street sweepers, home helps and policemen are our employers. The other meaning is statistically representative. People talk about so many men, so many women, so many blacks and so many gays. The idea that we can have statistical representation and entrust to those people the right to pass laws, which we are expected to obey, is an abuse of what we boast is democracy, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock said.

I am not much of an academic historian, but I have studied a few things in my life in order to understand where we are. On Second Reading of the Reform Act 1832, rioters shot two redcoats in Wales. Speeches in the House of Commons warned that extending the franchise would undermine parliamentary democracy. Later, when women campaigned for the vote, Mr. Asquith, the great Liberal leader, said that, if they got it, parliamentary democracy would be undermined.

Our system is designed to brainwash us into believing that some people are better than us. Every country has people who think that they are better than anyone else, but we must be the only country where everyone accepts that that is the case. The cultural aspect of the peerage is that we are trained from birth to bow and scrape to someone else. Mister bows to the knight, who bows to the baronet, who bows to the baron, who bows to the viscount, who bows to the earl, who bows to the marquess, who bows to the duke, who bows to the royal duke. They all bow to the Queen. That is deeply corrupting of the democratic spirit. The system is not only absurd, as has been said, but absolutely contrary to our boast that we are a self-governing country. When there are riots in the streets of London, the Prime Minister always says that we live in a democracy, but we do not.

We are now being trained for a new group of managers. According to Gerhard Schröder, Mr. Prodi is to be the Prime Minister of Europe, but he is not elected by anyone. The head of the World Trade Organisation is not elected. If a peer is better than us, perhaps the head of the WTO is also better than us. Perhaps we are so inferior that we are not fit to govern ourselves. That coded message comes through all our political and civic systems, our education and so on.

If we are to tackle the problem, which I have no doubt we will—I hope that it does not take 700 years, as it did to make the House of Commons democratic—we must

[Mr. Tony Benn]

recognise that it involves a challenge to power. There is no other way of describing it. We must say, quite openly, that we will not accept laws that are made by people who did not vote for.

I am not an advocate of violent action; I am a non-violent man. However, Governments only listen when there is trouble. I hate to say it but, for example, the pensioners would not have received that little bit more without the Labour conference last year. Possibly, handguns would not have been banned if there had not been a big demand in Scotland after Hamilton killed those children at Dunblane. Truthfully, the environmental movement would not have made much progress if Swampy had not been rather difficult. He will be the next people's peer, no doubt; we shall hear about that in the answer. My experience of progress is that it begins outside and, through the democratic process, permeates inside. Parliament historically is the last place to get the message.

I welcome the debate. It is a much more dangerous debate than perhaps the House might realise, because it challenges power. People in power do not want to be challenged. The Prime Minister did not want to lose the right to appoint people. As a matter of fact, the Prime Minister will, in a sense, appoint Members of the House of Commons. Some MPs will decide to retire at the last minute—they will get peerages—and, under the rules of the Labour party, it can appoint the successors. There could be circumstances in which Members of Parliament would have to apply to Lord Stevenson and prove that they would be comfortable in the House of Commons. Indeed, I can imagine that, if market forces reach much further, parliamentary seats might be put out to tender. I am sure that Bob Maxwell could have put in a better bid for my constituency than I could have. Perhaps even the Prime Minister's job should be subject to some external bid under the best value principle.

However one looks at it, the question must be tackled. My limited experience is that capitalism, communism and feudalism have one thing in common: the management can be changed, but the system cannot be discussed. Someone who discusses the system is a threat.

I had already made my last speech; I am afraid that I have done it again. My grandfather was the Member of Parliament for Govan, and was known as the poet laureate of the House of Commons. I will finish with some words that he wrote:

> "Though politicians dream of fame and hope to win a deathless name.
>
> Time strews upon them when they've gone, the poppy of oblivion."

10.12 am

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on his perspicacity and timing in securing the debate on people's peers. With a general election four weeks away, I must be slightly measured in my comments. However, we are going into an election with a Labour manifesto that calls for something that I, as a Labour MP, repudiate. The manifesto agrees with the royal commission on the reform of the House of Lords, chaired by Lord Wakeham, which calls for a second Chamber that is largely appointed, with a small elected element. That is simply not my view, nor was it the Prime Minister's view in 1996, when he said that Labour's policy was for a directly elected upper Chamber. Things have changed in that four-year period, and we now find ourselves, as the Government party, going into an election promising that one part of Parliament will be appointed rather than elected.

I believe that legitimacy only comes with election. Appointment fails on many counts, but what Wakeham proposed is absurd with a capital A. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, I believe in secular politics. What we will be asked to endorse—in the next Parliament, presumably—is not a secular second Chamber but a Chamber with people who have been appointed because of their religion. The Bishops Bench will be reduced from 26 to 16, I believe, but we will then have Buddhists, Baptists, Jains and Jews legislating on the laws of the land. I do not believe that that is right. More than that, I do not believe that members of the Labour party believe that that is right.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) talked about the patronage peers and how corrupting that is. Amazingly, over the next few days some of my colleagues in the House will decide that they do not want to stand for election to the new Parliament. They will be rewarded with peerages. That is deeply corrupting, not just for the people going into the House of Lords after the next election, but for those in the House of Commons, and I do not disparage my colleagues, who perhaps aspire to a peerage. It is corrupting and it should not be allowed.

Under the new system, we have the prospect of life peers serving well into the 21st century. I tabled an early-day motion in February 2000. The statisticians in the Library did some number crunching and told me that 49 per cent. of the present House of Lords will die by 2011. The average ages are 70 for male life peers and 64 for female life peers. About half of them will be dead by 2001; 90 per cent. will be dead by 2029, but 10 per cent. of those currently serving as life peers will still be serving in 30 years' time. We need a small, directly-elected second Chamber of no more than 100 to do a job of work. We do not need a bloated, elephantine monstrosity of 1,300, which is what we had before we got rid of most of the hereditary peers.

Will that happen? We had the ridiculous situation a week ago of people being discounted from consideration by Lord Stevenson because they would not feel comfortable in the second Chamber. He said that hairdressers could not cut it. That is a man who is a self-confessed intellectual snob. He should never have been given the job of chair of the Appointments Commission. In recent months, I have tabled many questions about that commission and I just about fell off my chair in January when I got an envelope with a little House of Lords stamp on the back. Inside was a letter from Dennis Stevenson, the noble Lord Stevenson. He wrote saying that over the Christmas period he had been looking at the questions that had been tabled about the work of the Appointments Commission. He noted that I had been very energetic and had tabled many questions and suggested that we talk about it.

I went to see Dennis Stevenson. He is a mover and shaker. He is chair of both the Pearson group, which owns the *Financial Times*, and the Halifax. That takes up a lot of his time, which probably explains why in the two years since he was appointed to the House of Lords he has spoken only twice. On both occasions he confessed to a feeling of nervousness.

Mr. Tony Benn: He was not comfortable.

Mr. Prentice: That is the man who says that hairdressers cannot cut it. I described all that as a sick joke. I am receiving lots of application forms from people out there who applied to Lord Stevenson saying that they wanted to be a people's peer. They tell me that they read in the paper that I think the whole process is a sick joke and that they agree with me. The whole system was designed to exclude 99.9 per cent. recurring of the British population. They never got a look in. We had that big con trick—not only the word from the spinmeisters in Downing street that we were going to have people's peers, but the farce of last year's four regional roadshows. They went from London to all four points of the compass with the message that new Labour would bring government back to the people. They said, "You, too, can become a people's peer; just fill in that application form, we'll check it against the criteria and you can join us in the House of Lords." It was never going to be like that. I will make a prediction for my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary. There will be no regional roadshows this year because, if the House of Lords Appointments Commission embarks on them again, there will be few members of the public, but many members of the media, finding out exactly what happens.

When I visited Lord Stevenson's lair in Tufton street, which is just round the corner from Smith square, it was incredible and like something out of "Smiley's People". The front door had no sign of who was behind it, and that office is separate from the main office of the House of Lords Appointments Commission, which is just around the corner in Great Smith street. I was ushered into the noble presence and, within about three minutes, we were almost at blows—he accused me of being political. I told him, "I am a Member of Parliament," but he said that I was there only to be political. I was interested in the process of how people would be plucked from obscurity to be put into the nobility. I wanted to know who would do the sifting, what criteria would be used and whether people would be interviewed.

Most important, I wanted to know whether people who were rejected would be told the reasons for that. I asked Dennis whether that would happen, because it is good employment practice. There was a pause, so I asked him whether it was ministerial policy not to tell anyone. There was a longer pause, and then I twigged. There was no ministerial policy on the subject; it is a Dennis Stevenson policy not to tell people why they were rejected. Now we know why people were not told the reasons for their rejection. Only a tiny percentage of the 3,200 people who applied were ever going to be seriously considered. That is pretty corrupt.

Something else is corrupt. Who appointed the noble Lord Dennis Stevenson, the snob? I tabled a question to the Leader of the House about the criteria and qualities expected in the chairman of the Appointments Commission. She replied:

> "The advertisement for the Chairman specified that the Government were looking for someone who is committed to making the House of Lords a body that is fully representative of all aspects of UK society and culture".

Well, blow me. If we are having 15 people's peers, half should be women, but that did not happen. There are seven knights, three professors and only a handful of women. On the chairman's qualities, she then said that the person should

> "demonstrate excellent communication skills, including managing the media".—[*Official Report*, 8 May 2001; Vol. 368, c. 64W.]

Can hon. Members believe that, after the farce of the announcement of the people's peers?

Who selected Dennis? The answer is a panel chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, assisted by Lord Fellowes, who sounds a good lad, and some other worthies, including a then independent assessor who is now a people's peer—incredible. I mean Cross Benchers, so I am not making party political points. I am talking about the process, the system, openness and transparency. We should be told about these matters rather than having to table parliamentary questions about them. Sir Herman Ousely, now Lord Ousely, was on the panel that selected Dennis Stevenson to become chairman of the House of Lords Appointments Commission. So there we are.

We must revisit the whole issue. When I said that the process was a sick joke, I meant it. I also meant it when I said that I hoped to re-ignite a debate on the future of the second Chamber. It saddens me to say it, but the Labour party has lost its way on this issue. The official policy cannot and does not reflect the views of the mainstream of Labour party members. No one in my constituency Labour party believes that the Government's policy is a good idea.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock on providing us with an opportunity to air this matter. It may appear a little arcane and an issue for the constitutional nerds, but it has a wider salience.

10.26 am

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay)—who has a longstanding interest in constitutional matters—on initiating the debate. He has debated the issues with verve, commitment and analytical skill. I am hopeful that his arguments will be carried forward into the next Parliament.

In common with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I am retiring from the House of Commons. I am disappointed that the present Parliament has not carried the process of constitutional reform further. I acknowledge that considerable and important changes have been introduced over the past four years. They represent the British way of effecting change: step by step, rather than as a consequence of a carefully thought out blueprint for democratic modernisation.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

Prior to the last general election, I had the satisfaction of meeting the current Foreign Secretary to discuss the possibility of a joint platform of constitutional reform—including changes to the House of Lords—that our two parties could endorse in our manifestos. If the electorate voted for a Government who could act on those recommendations, there would be a degree of legitimacy for a much wider reform of our institutions and more cross-party support than in the past. Earlier attempts to reform the House of Lords in the 1960s—including in the first Parliament in which I had the honour to serve—came unstuck because of the absence of any such agreement. The parties were divided about the direction of reform.

I felt that we had started the process of reforming the House of Lords quite well. We recognised the need to give priority to the removal of hereditary peers. No case was made for their participation in debates—and, ultimately, the enactment of legislation—when we were deciding what sort of upper House should replace one stripped of its hereditaries. It seemed that we might have some broad support for that proposition, but—partly because there were not enough Members like the hon. Member for Thurrock—for a long time, even among reformers, there was no consensus about what should take the place of the second Chamber. The whole thing seemed so anomalous that many in the Labour party thought that it should be swept away and that we should not have a second Chamber.

I have always favoured a second Chamber. The distribution of power, provided that it is accountable and democratic, is desirable; that is why I favour the devolution of power and want at the centre separate Chambers, performing somewhat different functions. It seemed right that that process should be kick-started after the last election. Unfortunately, our recommendations were not acted upon in the way that we recommended. We advocated the establishment of a Joint Committee of both Houses to introduce detailed proposals on structure and functions for the later stages of reform within a limited period. That body should produce recommendations for a democratic and representative second Chamber.

I take to heart what the right hon. Member for Chesterfield said about the two meanings of "representative", and I agree with him. The trouble is that the Government latched on to the notion of a second Chamber constructed—not elected—of people drawn from different walks of society on the wrong basis of belief that what we wanted in a second Chamber were people with experience of different activities, who could speak with the authority drawn from that experience. However, what we want are people drawn from our society by those who choose them to exercise their judgment based on their experience and the evidence before them. They should not be elected merely to speak for themselves or appointed merely to speak about medicine, for example, because they have served as the president of the Royal Society of Medicine.

We require people of weight and judgment, chosen by the electors; something that the appointment of the people's peers failed to achieve. An exercise in which people were appointed following consultation with PricewaterhouseCoopers and others was bound to fail. There are always hopeful people who will apply for opportunities to give public service. As one of those who launched the SDP, I received hundreds of letters from people offering their services who thought they would be suitable to be Prime Minister.

There is a deep failure to grasp the importance of democracy within the Government and within Parliament. In the White Paper on reforming the House of Lords in January 1999, the Government stated:

> "But the House of Lords and the work it carries out suffer from its lack of legitimacy, because the presence of the hereditary peers creates a permanent, inbuilt majority for a single party. For its functions to be properly performed, the House of Lords needs a degree of legitimacy which it does not now enjoy."

Candidly, a House of Commons and a House of Lords are either legitimate or they are not. It is not sensible to aspire to a degree of legitimacy.

Mr. Tony Benn: A hereditary peer would not get in on the basis of a degree of legitimacy.

Mr. Maclennan: I take the right hon. Gentleman's point.

We must aspire to legitimacy and that means democracy. If that word is missing from future dispositions, White Papers and other indicators of Government intention—what will appear in the manifestos of the various parties on that subject is also a litmus test—we must regard the entire process as suspect. We can expect that the House of Lords, in whatever form it is devised, will lose popular support and ineluctably wither away as an effective part of our constitution. As someone who believes in the distribution of power, I believe that that would be a pity.

10.35 am

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): This has been a most enjoyable debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on introducing it. I took issue only with his suggestion that my position as a Conservative spokesman made me part of the establishment. Over the past four years I have felt increasingly marginalised; indeed, I have begun to feel that I no longer exist in a country in which government is carried out. That feeling reached a climax yesterday when, with an overwhelming sense of nausea, I watched the performance of the new establishment launching its election campaign by hijacking a school assembly service in London for political purposes. It was disgusting, if typical of the general drift of politics over the past few years. It was an interesting example of how a Government can come into office full of commitments to democratise the political process but, four years later, can produce absolutely nothing in that regard except the introduction of some features of establishment life which, as a Conservative, I find even more objectionable than the ones that pre-existed them.

The hon. Member for Thurrock made some good points. The so-called people's peers are nothing of the kind, although I confess that I mildly participated in the process. A radical human rights lawyer asked me whether I would support his nomination; I did not quite draw the hairdresser analogy in thinking that he might bring a bit of spark into the institution or that he might make a particular contribution in the wake of the

Human Rights Act 1998, but I supported his nomination. I thought—thinking politically for a moment—that he was the sort of person on the borderline who might be nominated. However, it did not happen. Instead we had the appointment of the great and the good, with the usual dilution caused by the shifting position of the establishment. As has been said, it was a con trick. I am sure that it will not be repeated in terms of the regional bandwagons, from which point of view it is completely irrelevant. The system of people's peers was designed to cloak the fact that the Government, having made a commitment to reform the House of Lords, failed completely to carry through any sort of rational strategy or policy.

As a Conservative, if I were asked to choose between what we have now and what we had before we abolished hereditary peers, I would have to say that I see no benefit whatever in the present system. The previous House of Lords was archaic and indefensible on any rational or practical basis, but I had a greater affection for it than for what we have now. The question is what direction we should go in. Several pertinent points were made on that subject. Speaking not as a party spokesman but from a personal view, I believe that the trend of history lies in the direction set out by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield and the hon. Member for Thurrock. I believe that we will eventually end up with an elected second Chamber. There are drawbacks to that, about which I remain anxious.

The point about preserving an independent element was also made; the independent element in the present upper House is important. However, I am concerned whether we shall be able to preserve that element by that method. I realise that forms of proportional representation may make that possible, but I have my doubts.

The place will be dominated by placemen of parties. The difficulty is that if the second Chamber is to remain subordinate—I am sure that it must within our constitutional framework—I am sure that the hon. Member for Thurrock will agree that the problem is who will be attracted to do that particular form of work. Are we not in danger of ending up with the second tier of rejects from those who failed to get on selection lists for their political parties? Those are real issues that must be considered carefully before we embark down that road. Although the end product is logical in terms of democracy—as stated so eloquently by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield—and logic, it may not work as well in practice as it does on paper.

The second thing, which could be done at once, is to end the Prime Minister's powers of patronage over appointments to the House of Lords. Having seen the performance of Lord Stevenson in relation to people's peers, I, like the hon. Member for Thurrock, am worried about an appointments commission. However, if this House put its creative mind to the matter, we could set a statutory framework and guidelines and find suitable appointments commissioners to do the job. Beyond that, there is no earthly reason why the Prime Minister should have powers of patronage over appointments to the House of Lords. That could be got rid of quickly. When the Conservative party gets back into government, which I believe and trust will be soon, I hope that that is one of the first things that we shall do.

We have ended up with a hybrid. The Prime Minister says, "Of course, I am setting up the Appointments Commission. Various people will be appointed by it and I shall not interfere with the Leader of the Opposition's rights of nomination." That is nice, but the Prime Minister has kept the power to appoint such peers as he wishes. As long as that is the situation, the system will remain inherently corrupt.

The Liberal Democrats were angry about the criticism of Lloyd George by the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell). Lloyd George was extremely corrupt; it is as simple as that. He was extremely corrupt in the way in which he used his powers. As a matter of absolutes, one thing that I should like to see in politics is the diminution of the ability of politicians to be corrupted by their office or to corrupt others in the process of discharging their office, which is always a great challenge in democracies.

To return to a point made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, we must remember that, however clear-cut and perfect a structure we set up, it is still possible to corrupt it. I come from a half-French background. The constitution of the French Republic, as set up, is supposed to reflect democracy. If one examines the way in which it operates in practice, it is riddled with corrupt practices of one kind or another, despite its democratic credentials and its adherence to the rights of man. We should not get too carried away with the principle; we should examine the practice.

I want to leave a great deal of time so that the Minister has a leisurely opportunity to reply to the debate; I intend to speak for only a few more moments. I disagreed with the right hon. Member for Chesterfield when he said that the only constitution that we have in this country is the oath that we, as Members, take to the Sovereign. The only constitution that we have in this country is the oath that the sovereign takes at her coronation, which is worth examining because it forms a fairly reasonable framework—which can always be altered—for the way in which government should be conducted, if we remove the references to the established Church.

We have a flexible constitution that has served this country well and there is an essential role for an upper House. We need a revising Chamber that is relatively and reasonably detached from the cut and thrust of the political process, so it can take an independent view. That is what we should set out to achieve, and not gimmicks such as people's peers. The process by which the old constitution of this country has been gradually turned on its head has produced not the democracy that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield wants but a substitute for the sort of country that Napoleon III set about creating; a populist autocracy, in which the Prime Minister is Napoleon III writ small.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping): My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has introduced the debate in his usual challenging and robust way; I congratulate him on that, and on securing the debate. Many of his remarks concerned the suitability of the so-called people's peers. I confess that it is a phrase that I personally never use. However, I think of my hon.

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

Friend as a people's champion. Whatever the events of the next few weeks bring him, I will always think of him as the thane of Thurrock.

If the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) and the hon. Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and for Tatton (Mr. Bell) will forgive me, the early part of the debate seemed to concern the parliamentary Labour party. I am conscious of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) that the matter has not only been pursued historically but will be pursued in future.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) may not have the opportunity to pursue the argument in this place, but I know that he will do so vigorously elsewhere. I will not say that he made a farewell speech; I have said that before, and he may be tempted once more. However, I want to put on record an important and influential comment that he made, which was that we should not lose sight of the fact that the mood for change comes from outside the House. A strong Government and Parliament should turn outwards, listen to the voices, reflect on them and introduce change. My right hon. Friend mentioned the environmental movement. If we do not listen to its concerns and projections, there will be serious environmental consequences.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross and the hon. Member for Tatton acknowledged that things had changed. The message that I took from them was that change was not happening quickly enough and that we were not making enough progress on the matter. I look forward to hearing the views of the hon. Member for Tatton, perhaps in a debate of a different title, after 8 June. We will sorely miss the statesmanlike comments and perceptions that the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross has provided over many years.

It has been suggested that the list of names announced by the Appointments Commission proves that the idea of opening up the process of appointment to the House of Lords is a farce. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock went further and said that it was an absurdity, a nonsense and a charade. Supported by other hon. Members, he argued that, in effect, the usual suspects had been appointed, so nothing had been gained from the establishment of an independent commission on appointments. I do not believe that to be the case. In the past, the process by which peers were chosen was shrouded in mystery. For non-political, non-working peers, a list of names was published twice a year, but how the names emerged was known to few in government, and even fewer outside. It was not clear to the recipient, or anyone else, whether it was simply an honour or a recognition of past achievement for which nothing was required in return, or whether the main intention was that the individual would bring experience to the Lords and contribute to a revising Chamber.

Mr. Mackinlay: So what has changed?

Mr. Tipping: A great deal. First, the Prime Minister no longer controls the names. I know that there has been argument about the 15 names and the quality of the chairmanship of the Appointments Commission, but it has brought forward the names, not the Government. The obscure process by which the names were selected has been opened up, although perhaps not far enough for some of my hon. Friends. Instead of relying on soundings in Departments or the random recommendations of those outside who have some knowledge of how the system works, we now have, by the instincts of the Prime Minister, a more open and transparent system. We know who is responsible; the Appointments Commission is recommending the names.

Mr. Mackinlay: If there is greater transparency, can my hon. Friend the Minister tell us whether it was news to him, as it was to me, that someone on the body appointing the Appointments Commission was actually a beneficiary of it; a nominee after it was set up? My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) revealed that. It is wholly corrupt. Is the Minister going to address the question of Valerie Howarth who was clearly deficient in her application in terms of the criteria laid down by the Commission? Did that woman disclose in her application that she had failed in her application to become director of social services for Cambridgeshire?

Mr. Tipping: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I will come to those points in a second.

We clearly know who is making appointments and how that is being done. The important thing about the independent Appointments Commission is that it has set out criteria, which my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle has examined. He might not like them, but they are there for him to examine. The Appointments Commission has checked the names against those criteria. He mentioned the roadshows. Whether they continue in the regions next year is a matter for the commission. It is an independent body, which does not belong to me.

As an avid reader of the Appointments Commission's website, I am confident in the knowledge that it approached more than 10,000 organisations, asking for suitable candidates to apply. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield supported one such candidate. Its report is on the record. That contrasts with what went before. More than 3,000 people applied; that is a big step forward. Of those, 15 have been recommended for appointment. All have made it clear that they are willing to serve and expect to be hard-working, committed peers.

I shall labour the point; the Appointments Commission was set up to be totally independent. It has a remit, which I believe that it has fulfilled. My hon. Friends do not agree with the remit and that is the basis of their argument. Within the remit, however, the Appointments Commission has done its job. It is the commission that must take responsibility for individual names. The Prime Minister has committed himself not to become involved in those appointments and not to block names unless major issues, such as national security, arise.

It is not for me to comment on individual names and I will not comment in depth about the people who have been recommended. If we look at our careers—I say this to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock in an open-handed way—we have all made mistakes in the past. The important thing is to come through those mistakes. My hon. Friend asked whether it was news to me that Herman Ouseley, a member of the committee that appointed the Appointments Commission, was recommended. It was not news to me. The Appointments Commission will be issuing a press release today, setting out its views on that matter. It believes that the process was carried out properly and transparently. My hon. Friend might not accept those assurances, but those are the views of the commission, taken after careful consideration.

I would like to make some general comments about the people appointed. The individuals nominated—my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock has given names—have without exception, in their differing ways, given outstanding public service over many years and have exceptional records of achievement. As hon. Members have said, in comparison to the traditional composition of the House of Lords, the new peers come from more varied ethnic backgrounds, include more women and are, on average, younger. We have had a discussion about death. I wish these peers a long and active life in the House of Lords. We are making important steps in the right direction.

Mr. Grieve: I certainly do not consider that the people who have been appointed are unsuitable to serve in the House of Lords. However, does not the Minister agree that the list of names suggests precisely the sort of people that one might have expected to be sent to the House of Lords under the old system? The whole thrust of the idea of people's peers was to reach out to other or further sections of the community that had not previously succeeded in securing representatives. Is that not the key failure of the appointment process?

Mr. Tipping: I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. The success of the Appointments Commission has been greater than he acknowledges. A young man from the black and Afro-Caribbean community—who has been the chief executive of a voluntary organisation and has now been offered a peerage—is very different from the current kind of peer. The Appointments Commission has widened the range.

In the few minutes that remain I want to talk about the wider issues involved in the future of the House of Lords. Change has occurred, although my hon. Friend the member for Thurrock and others do not think that it has been sufficient. After a century of trying, phase 1 of House of Lords reform has taken place and the vast majority of hereditary peers have gone. We need to move from the past arguments to the future arguments. I am committed, as are the Government, to a way forward that builds on the work of the royal commission. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock grimaces at that, but the Government have made it clear that the basic premise of the commission's report is correct.

The argument made by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, which is supported by several hon. Members, is that the correct way forward is to disestablish the present system and put in place a democratically elected second Chamber. However, there are real dangers involved in creating a void and putting a new structure in place. In fairness to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield, he recognised some of those dangers. He acknowledged that the second Chamber's primary role should be that of a revising and delaying Chamber; a Chamber for the exchange of ideas. I am worried that we might set up a Chamber that is in opposition to the House of Commons. I believe in the paramount position of the House of Commons. In terms of the scales of balance, it is fundamentally important that that is where the real power and democratic structure of Parliament should reside. Any change to the second Chamber will have profound consequences for the House of Commons.

I am not arguing that we should not have change in the House of Commons; indeed, there is a compelling case for more modernisation. However, to create a democratically elected second Chamber comprising 100 peers elected by proportional representation, or whatever it may be, would have real consequences for the House of Commons. That requires careful thinking through, and I counsel my hon. Friends and colleagues within the party to take a cautious approach.

I want to make a couple of final points. I was asked what had happened on the question of the Joint Committee. Let me be blunt about that. We were unable to reach agreement on the Joint Committee's terms of reference, but the Government are committed to ensuring that all parties have a say in the way forward and the mechanics of changes to the procedures.

In conclusion, there has been vigorous debate in Westminster Hall today, and it is absolutely clear that there are different views. The debate will continue and I look forward to the publication of the election manifestos.

Police Manpower (London)

11 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I welcome the opportunity to introduce one of the last Westminster Hall Adjournment debates of this Parliament—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Andrew Welsh (in the Chair): Order. I ask those who are leaving to do so quietly.

Dr. Cable: It concerns a subject that is of considerable concern to my constituents and, I suspect, to many others across the capital. It is important to begin by acknowledging that matters have moved on since the initiation of regular debates in this Chamber on the London police, who are now the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police Authority. None the less, the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) has important residual responsibilities, particularly in respect of funding and of senior appointments. Indeed, much of what I say today will be relevant to him, rather than simply an indirect reference to the work of the MPA.

Many of my later remarks will seem critical or express concern, so I shall begin on a positive note. Good things are happening in the Metropolitan police. Many of my constituents reacted very favourably to the way in which the Metropolitan police handled the recent major demonstrations against globalisation, and I unreservedly support the work of the police in containing those demonstrations in a highly effective and professional way. As one of my constituents said, that is what we pay our taxes for.

After many years of decline, there is some—albeit short-term—evidence that recruitment figures are stabilising and possibly improving. The Government's crime fighting fund and the top-up from the mayor and the Greater London Authority have provided funding at least to stabilise, and perhaps to increase, police numbers. I gather that sufficient recruits passed through the training school at Hendon in the past few months to enable the targets to be met, and we hope that those figures, which demonstrate the positive element in the picture, are sustainable.

My colleagues who are here today represent the many different aspects of London. Like me, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) represents suburban Twickenham. My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), however, represents a rather different aspect of London and London policing.

Although I want to speak on a London-wide basis, I begin from the perspective of my own constituency, where there is a paradoxical situation. One might wonder why someone from Twickenham wants to raise crime as an issue. All surveys show that the police in Twickenham are extremely popular. The local police division survey showed that they are highly respected, very popular and the subject of little criticism. Senior officers work extremely well with the local community. In terms of key indicators such as burglary and street crime, all statistics demonstrate that ours is an exceptionally safe borough with very low rates of recorded crime. Moreover, there is considerable evidence to suggest that performance targets are being met.

However, that picture contrasts with the perceptions of constituents of all political persuasions, who often express serious fears. A contingent of constituents who visited my surgery last week were literally shaking with anger at the lack of order in their suburb. They said heatedly that it was the south Bronx of London, but I cannot imagine anything less like the south Bronx. The following day, I looked round the area and at first sight I was reassured. The street was placid, tree-lined and attractive, but a closer look revealed that every bus shelter had been smashed, every white wall had been daubed with graffiti, there was broken glass in the road and every car seemed to have been damaged. I was told that, the night before, 20 or 30 youths had gathered on the street corner drinking heavy spirits, smashing bottles and abusing residents. The police were called, but said that they could not come because they had no resources. There was a tremendous feeling of frustration.

I have raised the paradox of fear of crime and the apparent objective reality of very little crime. I am often told by the police that the problem is one of perception and I am beginning to worry about the concept of fear of crime. We are told that residents are suffering from a paranoid delusion and fear something that does not exist, but it does exist. The objective reality underlying the fear of crime is that in many parts of London, and certainly in mine, policing levels are low. In my division there are around 250 police officers and the number in Kingston is similar, which are by far the lowest numbers in London, at around one third of the level in a comparable population such as Lambeth. Lambeth has special problems, but are they three times more serious? Many of the crimes in my constituency about which people care passionately, such as widespread criminal damage, do not fall within the key indicators that are measured and monitored by the Metropolitan police, and much of the frustration arises from the fact that the problem is not treated as seriously as the main crime indicators.

Much crime is unreported. After another night of violence, I spoke to residents in Hampton and it seems that around 50 orders were placed with a local glazing company to replace broken car windows. However, only 15 incidents were reported to the police and when I asked some of the residents why they had not reported them, they shrugged their shoulders and said, "Why bother? There is no follow-up and nothing happens. Why should we report them?" They say that it is difficult to get anyone to come out from the police station and one wag on the police telephone said, "Why don't you call your MP?" The frustration is real.

There is a potential backlash in constituencies such as mine. We pay disproportionately more for London policing because of the precept on council tax. My constituency is an area of high council tax because of the way in which the mechanism of local government funding works and people pay disproportionately more and received disproportionately less in return. Of the 1,000 new police officers promised by the Metropolitan police authority, we shall have 14. That is very welcome and will bring the division up to its theoretical full strength, but it is a very small number and does not even begin to address the concerns that I am describing.

My concern is not parochial. I read the previous debate on the Metropolitan police and many of the same concerns were expressed by my colleagues in south-west London, by Conservatives in Uxbridge and Bexley, and by Labour Members in Croydon and Upminster. They were concerned about crime, much of it unreported and much of it not in high priority areas—for example, criminal damage and graffiti. The problem is not being tackled.

I have outlined the context in which I launch the debate, but I shall now concentrate on police numbers and recruitment. As the Minister knows, the context is one in which police numbers have declined steadily, year on year, without interruption since 1990. If blame is to be attached, it is widespread, although police numbers were much lower in the 1960s and 1970s.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that during the years of Conservative government, the number of police officers in London rose by 4,500, but under the present Labour Government, the number in London has fallen by 3 per cent. and crime has risen by 3 per cent. in the past year? That cannot be a coincidence.

Dr. Cable: It depends on which years we use as our base. In 1990, police numbers were 28,300. Since 1997, they have fallen to 26,675. Why the Conservative Government changed their priorities and started cutting police numbers is something that the hon. Gentleman will no doubt explain later.

There has been a transformation in the funding arrangements. The combination of the fighting fund and the GLA has created a more optimistic environment. I am sure that the Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I shall run through the arithmetic. Over the two years from March 2000 to March 2002, the base case from which the police and the Home Office will have been working is the expected decline in police numbers of about 2,700 because of wastage and retirement. Usual recruitment will bring in another 1,070, leaving a deficit of 1,600, as a result of which the rate of decline in police numbers will have accelerated.

Since its introduction, the crime fighting fund has funded 1,200 posts over two years, but that still leaves a deficit of 400 to 500. The extra precept contribution from the GLA now means that a positive balance has been achieved over that two-year period. That is welcome, but given that the crime fighting fund and the precept increase are politically difficult accomplishments, how does the Minister see such stabilisation being sustained for years in light of the fact that there will be a high level of attrition from the police through retirement? There will be a substantial bulge within the next few years.

As for recruitment policy, everyone welcomes the fact that London allowances have been increased substantially, thereby nullifying the negative effect of the withdrawal of housing allowances by the former Home Secretary under the Conservative Administration. That is a welcome change. However, I find certain aspects of the recruitment problem mystifying and inconsistent. When helping a police officer who had left the force prematurely and was living in police housing, I discovered that his house was in the process of being auctioned and that police houses throughout my constituency were being sold off at private auction, with no end use by the police service.

Common sense suggests that that is utterly perverse. We have an enormous police recruitment problem. There are police officers in my constituency who commute from Portsmouth and round the M25 from St. Albans because they cannot afford housing in the area. Yet, police property is being sold off. Substantial amounts of it have been sold over the years, most recently under the MPA, but previously under Home Office guidance. Will the Minister clarify matters? The only explanation that I have been given is that there is a mismatch between the accommodation that is available, which is mainly family, and that which is wanted by young recruits who are often single men and women.

However, even a moderately imaginative landlord could find a way in which to convert a three-bedroom house into bedsits with shared communal facilities. A little imagination by the Metropolitan police property department would solve the problem, which relates to the wider issue of affordable housing, our access to which is shrinking. In many areas such as my constituency, there is no land on which to build new houses. The stock of housing that can be afforded by young professionals, including police officers, is diminishing, yet an asset is being sold for no obvious reason. There is a distinct lack of joined-up thinking. I hope that the Minister will bring that problem to the attention of the Metropolitan police.

As for recruitment, we recognise that it is not only a matter of numbers. There must be quality and balance among the recruits, the most obvious being the ethnic mix. We know that the police are making big efforts. I pay tribute to Mr. Grieve and the impact that he has had in making the Metropolitan police a friendlier environment for ethnic minorities, both as members of the public and recruits. The culture is changing in a welcome way. Recruitment numbers are beginning to reflect that, but are still hopelessly inadequate in terms of the 25 per cent. target that has been set.

The problem is not simply one of ethnic minorities. Many types of people could make a useful contribution to the police service, but were discouraged in the past by unimaginative forms of recruitment. The Home Office has been examining recruitment criteria and perhaps the Minister would report on that. About a year ago, I brought to his attention the case of a young man who had a large gap in his teeth. Under a 1920's regulation he was debarred on medical grounds. That case was investigated and solved, but it was the tip of a large iceberg.

The problem is not only one of full-time police officers. One of the points emphasised by my colleagues is the need to examine a much more varied portfolio of police careers, especially the role of specials, the numbers of whom have declined astronomically in London and elsewhere under the Government. There are many unnecessary financial impediments such as lack of compensation or reimbursement for court time spent by specials. An unnecessary regulation has been brought to my attention whereby special police officers cannot stand for Parliament. One of my political colleagues, Jonathan Simpson who is a special police officer in Hampstead and Highgate, has had to choose

[Dr. Cable]

between a political career and one as a special police officer. There is no obvious reason why such a regulation should continue to exist.

Similarly, there is broad consensus among police thinkers of the need to use volunteers creatively—to man the police station for example, not go round with baseball bats late at night.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): I seek a point of clarification on the interesting question of the political responsibilities of police. A similar issue arises in relation to being a parish council member. Is it the view of the hon. Gentleman's party that all special constables should be able to serve in Parliament and take part in voluntary activities such as being a councillor for any political party? Does he believe that to be the case both for special constables and police officers in general? It is a genuine inquiry.

Dr. Cable: We have made the proposal in respect of special constables. As a result of the transfer of responsibility, police officers are no longer—even indirectly—civil servants. Metropolitan police officers work for a London authority rather than for the Government, so the potential conflict of interest that might have arisen as a result of a police officer being a Member of Parliament does not arise. We are putting forward the proposal for specials, but the Minister may wish to respond to the fact that the logic applies to the wider recruitment problem.

Mr. Heald: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously saying that the reason for the decline in the number of specials is that councillors cannot join? Does he agree with the special constable who said in *Police* magazine in February that the reason was that the service was a:

> "thoroughly demoralised and over criticised, under-resourced"

organisation whose

> "members work anti-social hours and often find themselves in...danger"?

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman widens the discussion unnecessarily. The Minister asked a precise and helpful follow-up and the hon. Gentleman's intervention was propaganda.

I noticed many specials in the lines of police officers manning the anti-globalisation protests. Therefore, they share in the credit attracted to the force as a whole, with all the improvements in morale that follow.

Clearly, the question of police manpower is not simply a numbers game, important though the number of officers is. It is also an issue of the usefulness of police time. I know that the Minister has devoted a lot of thought as to how much of the frankly absurd form-filling requirements of the police can be dealt with. I have seen studies that suggest that progress has been made on that problem, but much needs to be done.

In terms of the allocation of time, a question that concerns many of us is why police time cannot be spent more productively on the street. A recent survey conducted in north London showed that approximately 10 per cent. of operational police time was spent on the street, while 40 per cent. was spent administratively. Police officers often cite the little bit of received wisdom that the chance of a police officer on patrol encountering a criminal committing a crime is about as likely as being hit by an asteroid. That little bit of wisdom has acquired a dangerous life of its own. A little reflection suggests that, if beat policing is done more flexibly and thoughtfully, and if, for example, police walk on opposite sides of the street rather than together, or go on a car patrol and fan out from the car, many of the things that our constituents want to see, such as a visible police presence on foot outside their homes, could be achieved with an economy of manpower. I should be interested to hear from the Minister responsible for police how far thinking has developed in the police in terms of that old controversy.

On the use of time, I recognise that, as an economist would put it, substituting capital for labour can often be an intelligent way of managing resources. One way of substituting capital for labour is replacing people with cameras, or, at least, cameras that are watched.

I end with a little whinge to the Minister about cameras. I have tried for some years to support the local police and council in their efforts to introduce a CCTV system. He may recall my asking at Home Office questions why Treasury rules did not allow us to have a system because of the difficulties of funding recurrent costs. He wrote me a nice, sympathetic letter encouraging my local council and police to apply under his funding. They spent 18 months putting together a package and finding revenue streams that would enable them to cover recurrent costs, which they put forward a few months ago. A few weeks ago, they were told that they had been rejected because by then all the money had been spent. I hope that he will give a morale boost to my area by suggesting that the relevant fund will have a fresh look at that application. That is an example of the wider point that we are dealing not merely with numbers but with good use and deployment of resources.

Discussion about police numbers and police time relates to input rather than output. Eventually, we want to know whether crime is being reduced, as that is the name of the game. I do not want to enter into a sterile debate about whether crime is rising or falling. I simply make the point that there are big disparities in the way in which crime is measured, as we know from recorded crime and crime surveys.

A particular anxiety for my area is that many of the crimes that matter most to people are simply never recorded. If every graffiti tag were recorded, the crime figures would be astronomical and disastrous, which they are not. I ask the Minister—we are entering a general election in which crime reduction will be a key theme—to bear it in mind that in many areas such as mine there is still very deep apprehension about crime and the lack of policing, however it is measured.

11.22 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on having secured this important debate, albeit on the eve of the election. It helps us, before we leave this place, to focus on some of the real issues.

Police numbers have been a political issue for many years. If we were to read debates in the House from the 1960s and 1970s, we would see that similar arguments were being rehearsed. We have not learned from past mistakes in dealing with police levels, and I shall broadly enter that domain before making some more detailed points.

My hon. Friend rightly discussed the importance of performance as well as numbers. In the past, some Governments, in particular Mrs. Thatcher's first Government, decided that all that they needed to do was throw money at the police, and they wasted a lot of resources. Later Tory Governments decided that that was not the thing to do and slashed police numbers.

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the number of police constables—officers on the front line—increased every year under the Conservatives?

Mr. Davey: I do not accept that. In some periods, the number of Metropolitan police officers doing real jobs involving catching crime, whether on the street or in the office detecting criminals, fell. Police numbers in the Metropolitan police fell for 10 years, which included a long period of Conservative rule. The Conservatives seemed to take the position that the issue was not police numbers but performance. We need to stop thinking along the lines of the issue being numbers in one period and performance in the next—we need to tie both together and raise our ambitions about police performance levels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham is right to say that the key issue is outcomes, not just in terms of reducing crime but in respect of making our neighbourhoods, homes and communities feel safer. My constituents in Kingston and Surbiton are similar to my hon. Friend's constituents in that they perceive a great deal of crime, some of which is graffiti and vandalism. That is often called "low-level crime" in the jargon, but for our constituents it is serious; they see it as they come out of their doors and it makes them feel unsafe. We have an ageing population and many pensioners feel unsafe to go out on the streets. That is a public cost; it is a disadvantage to a society.

Some outcomes that we should be measuring are intangible. The issue is not simply whether car crime or burglaries have fallen or risen; we need to consider outcomes that are difficult to measure. If we put them high on the list, up there with such serious crimes as rape and street robbery, the need for extra police would be far more evident. We need to measure police performance rigorously to ensure that there is proper output for the input from the taxpayer. Let us ensure that those outputs and outcomes reflect the real desires of our constituents, rather than those that are easy to measure for Ministers and their officials. That is not what the game should be about: the outcomes and outputs should be those that matter to our constituents, and they are sometimes not as measurable as we in our technocratic world might like.

Having made that general point, I want to discuss some of the challenges that we face in respect of police numbers in London. The long period of decline is flattening out and things seem to taking an upturn; our challenge is to make up the police numbers that we have lost, so that we can raise levels of performance. At the same time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham said, from 2002 for about three or four years there will be a bulge, as a lot of officers will retire. We must keep recruitment going to make up for past losses and to prepare ourselves for the huge bulge of retiring officers. That is an enormous challenge for the Government and the Metropolitan Police Authority.

We must recruit thousands of officers, year on year, for a long period, especially if we want the police to meet the wider objectives to which my hon. Friend and I have referred. In Kingston, burglary and car crime are falling, but street robbery is increasing, as are a lot of minor crimes that are not measured, such as vandalism and disorder from gangs of youths resulting mainly from intoxication. If we want to crack down on such crimes, areas such as Kingston will need a substantial rise in police numbers.

We also need a strategy to persuade the media to report crime properly. In the past week or so, the local police in Kingston published the latest figures, which showed some reductions in crime. The local paper, however, decided to pick on one figure that showed an increase from a relatively small basis and make a splash headline out of it that totally misrepresented the crime statistics. That is not helpful in the fight against crime or in explaining to communities or individuals what is happening.

Mr. Charles Clarke: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman but, to be honest, I have thought about the matter a lot, and other than by spending a lot on positive PR, I am not sure of the approach that we should take to achieve what he wants. Does the hon. Gentleman have any proposals on how to achieve the aim that he sets out?

Mr. Davey: I, too, have thought about the problem, which is difficult. With a free press, if a journalist gets it into his or her head that there will be a scare story, there is nothing that one can do to stop it. I would not want it any other way. However, in the Kingston division the retired chief superintendent Alan Given and his successor, Geoff Braithwaite—who is very welcome—have taken a very proactive approach to dealing with the media. They have managed to get positive stories in the local papers for a considerable period. It is all about borough commanders and senior police officers taking a proactive response, rather than just responding to stories. It is similar to the way in which Millbank operates its spinning.

Mr. Clarke: Is the hon. Gentleman recommending that we should apply Millbank techniques to the police force in Britain?

Mr. Davey: I would not want to go in that direction. For example, I would not want to see Sir John Stevens visiting a school and singing a hymn at the launch of his campaign to get more money—that would not go down terribly well.

I shall discuss positive aspects of what is being done to meet the challenge that I have outlined. The recruitment exercise referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham is going well, and I have joined in that in two ways in Kingston. I joined chief superintendent Braithwaite and his officers at a recruitment fair in the Bentalls centre, which is the main shopping centre.

[Mr. Davey]

It pulled in not only potential recruits but young children who may be recruits in future. We watched actors performing an arrest. Some actors played drunken youths, and we saw how a police officer dealt with that situation sensitively. That demonstration of policing in town centres is a pro-active method of encouraging more people to join the police force.

Chief Superintendent Alan Given, who was head of Kingston police, was appointed by Sir John Stevens to head the recruitment task force at 26 Aybrook street, where the headquarters for recruitment is based. I went there a month or two ago to discuss how the recruitment exercise was going, what problems had been encountered and how they were dealt with. The first thing that was impressive was the management information database. Previously, the police did not know what was happening to applications or people coming through Hendon. Currently, there is careful monitoring and recruitment performance is assessed from the data. Surprisingly, that results in some of the flaws of previous practices being exposed, and new innovative methods of getting people to apply to and join the police.

A table of sources of inquiries breaks down where inquiries from potential applicants come from, such as from answerphone, billboard, career centre, Home Office, internet, jobcentre, magazines, newspapers and so on. A brief perusal of that table shows how, in July 2000, most requests were made by applicants leaving their name and address on the answerphone. I am pleased to say that that is no longer the main source of inquiry for an application, and more inquiries now come from responses to newspapers, magazines, proactive work by the police, and, interestingly, via the internet. In July 2000, 69 inquiries were received from the internet, while in February, 1,001 such inquiries were received. The Metropolitan police are moving into the 21st century and using the internet as a method of getting people to apply for jobs. That is welcome, and I pay tribute to Chief Superintendent Alan Given and Sir John Stevens for the work that the task force is doing. I could go through many other tables, but I feel that I may try your patience, Mr. Welsh.

Information is now being made available, and it is significantly influencing recruitment methods. Old practices are being abandoned. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham has alluded to some of them, and I want to describe one more. An applicant was told that he was too young and that he should go away and get some experience of life. He backpacked round the world for two years, but when he returned, he was told that he could not apply to join the force as he had not been resident in the UK for the past two years. There are far too many examples of the Metropolitan police acting in arcane ways and setting up obstacles, so it is not surprising that the tearing down of old practices has led to a large increase in recruitment.

A key question is whether institutions such as Hendon should be expanded. Can it currently accommodate enough recruits for us to realise our ambition of policing the capital as thoroughly as Londoners would wish? If the numbers of recruits passing through Hendon are kept up over the next few years, would that be sufficient to meet the challenge that we are facing? The Minister should examine that issue with the Metropolitan Police Authority.

I have a couple of minor criticisms of the Government. I am delighted that they restored the housing allowance. The Tories cut it and that was a disastrous policy: recruitment fell dramatically, which set back policing in the capital by several years. However, the Government failed to restore it quickly enough. My party had to harry them for three years before they eventually got round to reintroducing it, but even then they did not do it properly. There are several anomalies, and I wish to draw one of them to the Minister's attention. Prior to 1994, single officers received half the housing allowance. In 1994, that allowance was frozen: if such officers subsequently married, they still received the single person's housing allowance. However, those officers, who have been serving for several years, might now be working alongside new recruits who receive the full London housing allowance, regardless of whether they are single or married. Experienced officers receive less housing allowance, even though they have remained in the police, merely because they happened to be single prior to 1994. What message does that send to them? It cannot be right. I hope that the Minister will tackle such anomalies.

The Government are addressing another important issue because my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) brought it to their attention in the House several months ago: the need to encourage officers to stay in the force longer. I hope that the Minister can report some progress on that. Although it is important to encourage new recruits, it is also necessary to address the issues of quality and experience, as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham said. We must ensure that the cadre of police officers comprises not only new and inexperienced recruits but a broad range of officers, some with 30 or 40 years' experience, others with 20 years, and 10 years, and five years. Veterans and new recruits learn from each other, and they offer different skills and attributes to help meet the challenge of policing in London. It is therefore essential that the Government swiftly produce concrete proposals to encourage officers who are approaching their 30-year period of service to remain in the police.

I have spoken to several officers about the matter, and it is apparent that the key issue is their lump sum payment after 30 years' service. They want to be allowed to stay on when they take the money, rather than also be required to take their pension, and to be penalised by the tax system. Although that change might require primary legislation, the Government must facilitate officers to stay on by addressing that financial matter. That would provide a massive incentive, and make a considerable contribution to the recruitment challenge and to helping to ensure that we get the correct mix of officers within the London force.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Before my hon. Friend concludes, will he comment on another annoying feature of the police force nowadays, whereby an officer who has become familiar with an area, has built up contacts among the general population and knows the children and the head teachers of the schools is then moved somewhere else? I appreciate that there are reasons for doing that, such as avoiding corruption, but I cannot believe that it is good practice. It is damaging not only for the officer's family but for children who grow up in the community and elderly people. It is important for them to know their police and to see them regularly in the area, but the current practice militates against that.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. She is absolutely right. The policy of tenure under the former Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis is gradually and diplomatically being phased out by the new commissioner, and not before time. I hope that it will tackle the sorts of problems to which my hon. Friend referred. She and I share a wonderful area called New Malden, which crosses the boundaries of our two constituencies. It happens to have the largest population of Koreans in the UK, for the historical reason that the Korean embassy was situated nearby. A few years ago, the local beat officer went to the trouble of learning Korean. That shows the degree of commitment of some of our wonderful officers. Having learned Korean, however, he was moved away to an area where there was no Korean population, supposedly in the interests of his career. That was bad policing—the officer did not want to move, but he was required to do so. That is an example of how absurd bureaucratic practices can diminish good policing.

I want to make two other points, one of which is a constituency lobbying point in respect of technology, and, specifically, cameras. I know that the Minister is still in office, and Parliament is not dissolved, so I am sure that he can answer positively. Kingston council applied for funding for CCTV on Tolworth Broadway. I wrote to the Minister on the matter when the Home Office turned the application down. I was disappointed because there has been a spate of vandalism and attacks on individuals going about their business on Tolworth Broadway. Shopkeepers and the local community feel that if they had CCTV, they could protect the area far more effectively. The police believe that such IT investment could be used to good effect, and that criminals who are vandalising property and attacking law-abiding citizens could be caught. I hope that, in the last few days of this Parliament, the Minister will review that decision and consider making a grant to Kingston council, to enable CCTV to be installed in Tolworth Broadway.

My final point is a general one about the allocation of police resources—the famous resource allocation formula, which I am sure that hon. Members have considered. I am delighted that my noble Friend Lord Tope, who is chairman of the finance committee of the Metropolitan Police Authority, is considering reform of the resource allocation formula in London. It must be reformed, because it does not reward success. If crime is reduced through effective policing, resources are taken away, which is the most perverse incentive that I can think of for tackling crime. If local police reduce one or two of the headline crime statistics, there are many other services that they would like to provide to their community. Such a resource formula will not increase service or performance levels, because the incentives are wrong.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham on representing his constituents on this issue with a tenacity and ability that is probably unequalled by any other Member of Parliament. He has done a sterling job, and has raised an important issue, which Liberal Democrat Members have a great ambition to resolve through major investment in London's police.

11.44 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I, too, am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words. I am grateful for the persistence of my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) in seeking Adjournment debates. I have not counted but, at the end of this Parliament, he is surely near the top of the Adjournment debate league. He does it not because he loves speaking in such debates but because he is keen to ensure that issues are brought to the Minister's attention and that progress is made, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) said.

I should explain that the red box in front of me is not here because of some new arrogance or delusions of grandeur on my part. The reason is simply that my office prepared my papers for today and put them in this box. I have never before appeared in the House with a red box, although in a few weeks' time, I and all my hon. Friends will have red boxes.

The issue is important, and I am grateful that we are debating it again, less than a week before the dissolution of Parliament. The blunt fact is that police numbers have gone down significantly during this Parliament. That is not something for Labour to be proud of, and the public will be reminded of it regularly before the election. The decrease in numbers was not necessary. It was obvious that that would happen if the Government did not alter their spending limits. The Home Secretary epitomised the Government's belated awareness by appearing at Hendon the other day, surrounded by police recruits. The Minister was aware of the need for publicity campaigns and more money before he became a Minister at the Home Office, and it is something that some of us have been urging on the Government throughout the term of the Parliament.

Police numbers have gone down across London and in individual boroughs. In my borough of Southwark, we have a larger police establishment than in outer London boroughs, but we are not up to strength. People such as the borough commander, to whom I pay tribute, say that they would be able to do more if they had the full complement of police officers. Clearly, adequate resources are needed to deal with tragedies such as the death of Damilola Taylor and the investigations that followed it.

Another unsatisfactory situation is the decrease in special constables in London and the rest of the country. That problem is less obviously the fault of the Government, and they have shown a belated interest in it. I was privileged to chair the special constables awards in Portcullis house the other day in the presence of the mayor of London, the commissioner and others. It was a splendid event, which honoured excellence in special constable work. The winner this year is a special constable who looks after Deptford market in the London borough of Lewisham. Police and special constable numbers must increase in the London boroughs.

Mr. Heald: When we pressed the Government to keep recruitment up and to increase police numbers, their

[Mr. Heald]

reaction was that our argument was sterile and simplistic. That is what the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said. Only recently have the Government woken up to their duty to have a recruitment campaign and put some officers on the street.

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is right. It is bizarre that, in the first half of the Parliament, the Government said that they could not do anything about police numbers, which were entirely a matter for chief constables. The Government said that they would allocate money, but they stayed within their spending limits. The second half started with the famous Bournemouth speech; the Home Secretary got into a bit of a pickle, and suddenly the Government started allocating money. That money effectively became ring-fenced and allowed police numbers to increase.

I shall not be overly political, but my hon. Friends have pointed out the weakness in the point made by the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald). After a good record on police numbers from 1979 to 1992, for some inexplicable reason the previous Tory Administration suddenly took their eyes off the ball and started the decline in police numbers that the Labour Government continued. In London, neither Labour nor the Conservatives come to the election with a history of having done well in their last term of office. They have done badly with respect to police numbers and safety for Londoners.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman knows that the number of police constables rose every year under the Conservatives. Why will he not accept that point?

Mr. Hughes: The uninitiated may not be aware of this debate. It is about police officers. I do not want to get stuck in the statistics groove, but the crude facts are that the numbers of police officers—people drawing their salary and putting on the uniform—decreased between 1992 and 1997. The numbers had risen before then. I pay tribute to those officers. Of course it matters whether they are out on the streets or behind a desk. I agree that we need them more out on the streets.

Mr. Charles Clarke: For the sake of accuracy, police numbers went down from 1990, not from 1992. That is two years more than the hon. Gentleman stated.

Mr. Hughes: I am aware of that. I was not seeking to hide it. I was seeking to take each Administration separately. I was comparing the previous Tory Administration with this one.

The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire is about to speak on behalf of the Tories, yet surprisingly not one single Tory or Labour Member representing London is here. In a one and a half hour debate the speakers will include the person who moves the debate, the Minister who responds and probably the spokespeople from the three parties. It is unusual for the other parties not to have at least one representative. I cannot believe that all the people who are not here will also be absent this afternoon. I wager that many London Members, Tory and Labour, are in the House today. They are just not at this debate on policing in London.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (in the Chair): Order. I know that hon. Members are keen to fight the general election, but I hope that they will stay in order and on the subject.

Mr. Clarke: Just for information, there is a meeting, as there is every week at 11.30 am, of the parliamentary Labour party, which my colleagues are attending. The Prime Minister is speaking at it and that is why they are not here today.

Mr. Hughes: That is quite a good, although not a completely good reason. Surely one representative of the London Labour MPs could have attended the debate, but if the Prime Minister is upstairs reading from the hymn book and singing at the troops I am sure that it will all be lovely.

Mr. Clarke: Hear, hear.

Mr. Hughes: The Minister is bound to say that.

My colleagues and I are much strengthened in our case. We six Liberal Democrat Members have had police manpower in London at the top of our agenda in this Parliament and are therefore pleased—I pay tribute to the Government for this—that responsibility has now been transferred from the Government to the Greater London Authority and the Metropolitan Police Authority. I pay tribute to those authorities and to the mayor for the way in which they have started their work. The mayor made it clear that he wanted significant numbers of extra police in London and the GLA therefore raised the precept to start that process. That was a good decision, which we gratefully supported.

Mr. Davey: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Conservatives on the GLA wanted to cut the police budget by £48 million, which would have undermined the policing in London?

Mr. Hughes: It was extraordinary that when the parties on the GLA put forward their budget proposals, the Tory proposal was significantly lower than that of the mayor, the Liberal Democrats and Labour members. The blunt truth is that people have choices. I am sure that my hon. Friend will not cease to remind his electorate of that in the next few weeks, and rightly so. At the end of the day, political parties are teams and we are collectively accountable for our decisions.

One matter that the GLA and the MPA have taken over has particular interest for my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge). The Carriage Office, which regulates taxis in London, has been given the long overdue job of dealing with minicabs. That is indirectly related to police manpower because the more people who are working, the quicker the job can be done. I therefore wonder whether we will soon have a change in regulations about numbers of taxis generally, which is a concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton. Will we get on with licensing minicabs so that the safety issues, on which my hon. Friend has been a pre-eminent campaigner, can be addressed?

Dr. Tonge: Is my hon. Friend aware that only last week in my constituency a young woman was raped by a bogus minicab driver? That was not the first such incident; it happens far too often in London. Is he aware that it is two and a half years since the Bill was enacted, but we are only just beginning to license minicab firms, let alone drivers and their vehicles? Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Hughes: It is a disgrace. I was not aware of that case, but we would all express revulsion at it. I hope that my hon. Friend's comments, although brief, will be noted and that the Commissioner, his force, the Carriage Office, the GLA, the MPA and others will get on with the job. Every day that that does not happen, people's safety is at risk. I am sure that, like the rest of us, my hon. Friend will keep up the pressure.

Like Sir Paul Condon, Sir John Stevens is seized of the need for more police officers in London. I pay tribute to them, to Trevor Pearman, my local borough commander who recently moved on, and to Rod Jarman, the current borough commander. They have made the case for more officers at every opportunity.

Demand is such that provision is stretched. For obvious reasons, there are many more pressures on policing in London than that in other parts of the country. Events such as the anti-globalisation protest focus on London, because it is the capital city. Normally, it has national sporting events. I say "normally" because, although Twickenham carries on and Millwall football club is even more pre-eminent than before—[*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton does not agree, even though Millwall has just been promoted, winning its final match on Saturday 5-0. We have lost Wembley temporarily, although perhaps for slightly longer than we had bargained for. None the less, there are huge extra demands on London, and we pay tribute to the police for dealing with them.

Yesterday, there was a big protest outside the Home Office. People were protesting, rightly, about anti-terrorism legislation that the Government got wrong. It is not wrong to have such legislation, but they got the detail wrong. Sadly, the police were also required at some cost for two National Front marches in my constituency on recent weekends, and there will be a third this weekend. The good news is that the marches attract little support. The bad news is that they are extremely demanding of police resources, manpower and time. I wish that the National Front would realise that its prejudiced view is not nearly as appealing as it thinks.

Although such demands exist, we should not say that marches and protests should not take place. They are in the nature of political life in any democracy, so we must bear their cost. The public understand that there must be policing of the May day activities on one hand and of the National Front on the other. I dissent from the view floated the other day by Lord Harris of Haringey, the chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority, that the National Front should be a proscribed organisation. I am keen for us to re-examine the public order legislation, but once we start to ban people from expressing views completely, we get into trouble.

Mr. Charles Clarke: Let me say for the record that Lord Harris was speaking for himself on that occasion, not for the Labour party.

Mr. Hughes: I understand that. I did not mean to misrepresent the position and I hope that I did not. My understanding is that the Home Secretary's view is similar to mine and shared by Ministers. There are powers to ban marches in certain cases, but they require the police to come to the view that they cannot manage the public order implications.

My party believes that there should be an increase in overall numbers and that there should be minimum numbers. We have put a proposal to the Government, to which they have not yet signed up, that there should be a standing conference on policing to keep both sets of numbers under review and to make objective recommendations on what they should be. My hon. Friends and I approach the debate in the belief that there is a case for London to have police numbers comparable, in proportion to population, with those of New York and Paris. That would mean a significant number of extra officers, which the public want and are willing to pay for.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham and others that the problem is not a shortage of interest. Yesterday, I went with our party leader to English Martyrs Roman Catholic primary school in my constituency to start our election campaign. When we asked the youngsters what they wanted to do in the future, a little lad of 11—he happened to be a black lad—said, "I want to be a police officer." Many people spot that career option, but we are not very good at responding to it. Will the Minister say whether the Government are urging the MPA and London police authorities to consider two different ideas: a cadet system and a sponsorship system? A police cadet system would get people interested and police authorities that opted into a sponsorship system, rolled out nationally or in London, would be able to tell potential recruits, "If you are aged 16 or 17 and willing to join the police, we will pay for you to go through college. If you sign on for five or 10 years we will look after you in the early years, as the armed forces do and as many City firms have done in the past." That would increase recruitment and I am keen for the Government to support it.

Secondly, I want to underline the points that have been made about housing needs. Many more people would be police officers in London if they had local housing; they do not all want to travel for 50 or 100 miles to work. There is a case to be made for what used to be called section houses for police officers when they join the force, usually at an age when they are not yet married. It is like going to college or university—the new officers are with their peer group and are usually happy to be housed in student-type accommodation and to be with their mates. It is a good experience before settling down and living in their own place. I want section housing to be brought back and key worker housing to be developed.

[Mr. Hughes]

Can the Minister say whether any police force has carried out a needs assessment of the kind of housing that the police want so that that profile can be matched to what is provided? We should consider making part of the salary, or perhaps a bonus, portable and able to be transferred from one property to another.

Thirdly, I support the proposition mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton that we should break with the idea of police signing on automatically for 30 years. Police officers should be allowed to sign on for 10, 20 or 30 years, starting at the age of 18, 28 or 38, and then be allowed to carry on beyond the age of 48 or at the end of a 30-year period if they wish to do so. A more flexible system would attract many more people, some of whom, at about the age of 40, may be fed up with their job and want a life change. They would be happy to do police and community service. I cannot understand why it has taken so long to respond to such suggestions.

Fifthly, may we please have part-time police officers? That would allow many people with family commitments to join the police force. We should also get rid of the nonsense that prevents people becoming specials; for example, in order to be the Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate in Hampstead and Highgate, Jonathan Simpson has had to resign his special commission. There may be few people in that category, but no one should be precluded from doing public service because he or she has a political career. A Member of Parliament should be able to be a special constable.

Sixthly, may we have a community safety force to supplement the police? Seventhly, may we encourage the police to recruit more volunteers? Front desks do not need to be staffed by uniformed police officers. It is frustrating to have to wait in a queue because no officer is available; someone has to be there when people ask at the desk for police assistance, and a volunteer would perform that job adequately.

My penultimate question to the Minister is please can we stop tying up so much police time in replicating work done by others? Every police sector does its own crime statistics. Surely, a few people in the service could compile the crime statistics for the whole of the Metropolitan police and relieve officers on the beat of that task.

Lastly, there is a danger that police are now into partnership policing and that is all very good, Mr. Winterton—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): I hesitate to intervene on an hon. Member who is so experienced in this place, but the one thing that I have gained in 30 years here is the title additional Deputy Speaker. At this stage in a Parliament I would love to be so called.

Mr. Hughes: I bow deferentially to your status, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You are one of the few people who have been here even longer than I have.

The police are keen that they do not have to attend more and more meetings that replicate the same work. I end on a key point. The funding formula needs to be altered because unless we recognise and reward success, we penalise it. The Minister has told me two or three times in debates that the Government are examining how to do that. It is difficult, and I do not know whether talks have taken place to reach an agreement. It must be a priority for whoever is at the Home Office after the election that police success—not just in London, but everywhere—does not result in a financial penalty to the service. I hope that we have made a strong and practical case for ways in which we can increase police numbers; we need more and the public want us to provide more. This was the last opportunity to make that case in this place before the general election.

12.5 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Yesterday, the Prime Minister visited the constituency of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who came here today with a red box. I wondered whether that was a sign that the third way was back on track.

We have had a good debate, and it is pleasing to have the opportunity to pay tribute to the officers of the Metropolitan police—and the City police, because we are debating policing in London. The police do a magnificent job, often in difficult circumstances. I also congratulate Sir John Stevens on his leadership of the Metropolitan police. The London public were dreading May day this year because last year's scenes were dreadful. Some of our most important national monuments were desecrated and there was widespread violence, but police planning and performance kept us safe this year.

If the Minister is prepared to comment, what does he think about some of the protestors' comments that they may now complain under the Human Rights Act 1998 and seek damages for the way in which the protest was policed? It is the job of the police to secure the peace. Does the Minister not agree that that Act should not deflect the police from that duty? Does he accept that it is odd for protestors to complain after the peace has been kept and, if he feels that the Act, which his party introduced, will lead to such nonsense, should he not put forward proposals to change the situation?

Mr. Charles Clarke: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm whether his party intends to repeal the Human Rights Act 1998 if it is elected at the next general election?

Mr. Heald: It is no secret that we have not suggested repealing the Act, but we would be grateful if the Minister, with all the advice, assistance and legal help that he receives, told us the legal position on the protestors' complaints. The Government introduced the legislation and, if there is a problem, all parties will want to examine it.

Between March 1979 and March 1997, police strength in the Metropolitan police increased by 4,500. This Government came to power promising to put more officers back on the beat but, almost from the start, their philosophy was that increasing police numbers was not vital and a sterile argument. Indeed, the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) said on 4 February 1999 that

> "we must move way from sterile and simplistic arguments about police numbers."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 1999; Vol. 324, c. 1099.]

As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said, Opposition Members, in particular my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who was shadow Home Secretary at the time, argued that we must keep police numbers up and continue recruiting. To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, he did too. We are constantly told, "Oh no, we are not debating that today; we must assess efficiency." The Government have badly lost their way.

The Conservative years witnessed rising police numbers, with more constables appointed every year. The number of civilians employed was also increased by 50,000, releasing many officers to work on the front line. No one would say that it was perfect, but rising police numbers and their greater presence on the streets was better than what followed under the Labour Government. Police numbers declined rapidly against a background of retention problems, so crime rose. It is inexplicable why the Government took that line.

In London, police numbers fell from 26,677 in March 1997 to the latest figure of 24,861—a fall of 1,816 officers. As a result of boundary changes, it might be fairer to reduce the figure to about 1,500. The City of London police have experienced a fall of 148 officers. Overall in London, 1,600 or more officers—3 per cent.—are no longer policing our streets. At the same time, the number of special constables—volunteers who give their time to police our streets—fell nationally by a third.

What has been the effect of the decline in police numbers? Sir Paul Condon, the highly respected former Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, said:

> "It means that we cannot devote the resources to murder inquiries that other forces do. It means we have fewer bobbies on the beat that we, or the public would like... The time for fudge and prevarication is over."

Others followed up the same theme of rising crime. In the year to September 2000, 6,000 more violent crimes were committed in London than in the previous 12 months—a rise of 3 per cent. We have thus seen a fall of 3 per cent. in police numbers and a 3 per cent. rise in crime over the past year. It is no coincidence or surprise: fewer officers doing the job will lead to a rise in street crime, so the Government should take responsibility for it.

In December last year, Sir John Stevens announced that the Metropolitan police was in crisis. He spoke about the ability to fight crime being "stretched" and pointed to rises in street robbery and violence and increased use of guns. He also emphasised the difficulties of recruitment:

> "People are saying, 'Do we want to join the service?'"

A few weeks ago, the Home Secretary announced that the number of police recruits was increasing, with a 27 per cent. rise in the numbers sent to Hendon, but in the last financial year, the Metropolitan police lost 199 officers.

It is instructive to hear the comments of the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation, Glenn Smyth. The Minister laughs, of course, because he will not like the following quote:

> "It may be good news for other parts of the country, but it is certainly not good news for the Met... Only 3 per cent. of application forms sent result in a recruit at training school."

That certainly does not constitute a success. He continued:

> "The Met is a ticking time bomb... unless there is a huge upturn in recruitment and more importantly retention the Met will be a third smaller in 2005-06. If there is a light at the end of the tunnel it certainly hasn't been turned on yet!"

I recognise the truth in that.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) referred to the bulge in imminent retirements. We may have had a one-off boost in recruitment, but at the cost of a huge national advertising campaign and the Metropolitan police deciding that people whom they had previously rejected for various reasons could join the force after all. It is not a sustained improvement for the future. If the Minister is serious about the police service, he will have to tackle some of the serious morale problems that it faces.

The fact that police stations in London are closing is of concern to London residents. The force is being stretched out, with 1,600 fewer officers and no special constables to fill the gaps; police stations cannot be manned. The Minister will confirm that around 40 police stations have closed during the Labour years. Chief Superintendent Jarrett, talking last year about the closure of Pinner, Edgware and Wealdstone stations, said:

> "I share people's concern. I'm a resident here. I know what it's like not to have a police station nearby when, for example, you want to report you'll be away from your house for a few weeks. It's very difficult."

Morale in London is hit when the ordinary officer on the beat who wants to do a good job, as the public want him to do, has to say, "Well, I'm sorry, your police station is closed. We do not have the men or the women to police your area in the way that we would like." It is sad that on a day such as May day we have officers everywhere and see what a fantastic job the police can do; they can have high visibility and provide us with policing in the capital of the sort that people want—yet that is not the case year round.

The Government say that when we were in government we had years of putting extra money into the police and rising police numbers, but still did not get on top of crime—however, that shows how long it takes and what a sustained effort is needed to reduce crime and change the culture so that people believe that police officers will catch them if they commit crime. Once we let the situation slip—as the Government have done—and start saying that police numbers do not matter, that the debate is sterile and let numbers fall, youngsters thinking of committing crime start doing so because they can get away with it. The word goes round that the police are not out there. One ends up with a culture in which violence on the street is more prevalent.

The country will pay the penalty for those years of neglect under Labour. It is no good saying just before an election, "Oh well, we've realised we were wrong and have put extra resources in and got a few police officers. We are sorry—give us a second chance." Damage will be done to London for many years. I hope that all the

[Mr. Heald]

proposed new recruits come forward and I welcome the fact that there are more, as do all Conservative Members. However, a young officer on the beat for the first time is no substitute for those seasoned officers who have left the force. All officers of experience say that it is officers who have been doing the job for a period who do the best work for the police. I welcome the volunteers.

In conclusion, we need to restore police numbers and morale. We must be fair and not over-criticise. We must get rid of red tape and review police functions so that police officers do the job that they should do. It is about ending the insult of the early release scheme whereby officers who have been assaulted see the early release of the more than 200 criminals who carried out the assaults. It is about cadet schemes, part-time police officers, and specials and retirees working for a few more years and allowing officers to work for less than 30 years. Above all, we must restore police morale, which requires a change of Government.

12.19 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): We have heard some excellent speeches during the debate—they did not all consist of political tub-thumping—and a wide range of important points were made. I thank the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) for initiating the debate. The tone with which he and his Liberal Democrat colleagues spoke was correct. They tried to identify the problems, but suggested that there had been progress in some areas and identified that straightforwardly. I appreciate that, because when such matters are reported in the media, it is important that they are dealt with soberly. I acknowledge that some matters still need to be rectified and I shall speak about those, but the story is more positive than it has been for a long time.

I want to emphasise this momentous period for the Metropolitan police. The Metropolitan Police Authority was established last April and many people had campaigned for that important development for a long time. It changes many of the relationships significantly. The relatively new leadership of Sir John Stevens and the deputy commissioner, Ian Blair, is driving through a major and important programme of reform in the Met. The boundaries of the Met have been redrawn so that they are coterminous around Greater London and, even more significantly, within Greater London the establishment of borough commands, which are coterminous with the local authorities, gives a massive drive to all the work that needs to be done on development of crime reduction partnerships.

I pay tribute to the work being done by borough commanders throughout London. I have visited many parts of London during the past six to nine months, for a variety of reasons, and the quality of the borough commanders whom I met has been outstanding. The work being done by the force to decentralise decisions to the borough commands to enable that partnership to develop is important, but difficult for reasons that we know.

We have made changes in numbers and resources and I want to make a couple of party political points. It is important to record that police numbers in London were in decline from 1990 onwards. When we came to power in 1997, there were fewer police officers in London than at any time during the 15 years since 1985. We decided to accept the Conservative spending limits for the first two years and there was plenty of argument about that and our decisions on how to deal with our appalling economic inheritance, particularly public spending, which we had to get under control. We took that decision first and we have seen the result in low interest rates, high employment and strong growth. There are party political arguments among Liberal Democrats and in my party on whether those decisions were right, but they were taken and the proof of the pudding has been in the eating because they allowed the strong increase in funding that we have seen in the past couple of years, which has been projected through the comprehensive spending review to the future.

From 30 September 2000 to 31 January 2001, there has been an increase of 160 officers in the Met, which is the first significant increase for more than a decade. The hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) referred to police stations and it is worth bearing it in mind that during the past year, 2000-2001, for the first time in 10 years, no police stations were closed and four were opened. There was an increase in the number of police stations in London last year.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the difficulty of attracting recruits, but interest in joining the Met is currently at unprecedented levels, with more than 250 inquiries every day and more than 6,000 information packs being sent out to prospective applicants during March. That is not a picture of a force finding difficulty in recruiting people. I shall not go through the arithmetic of the extra resources that we have put into London, including the important increases in pay and the establishment of the rail companies operating system with the welcome assistance of my hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Indeed, I am delighted to see the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), in his place to commend that tremendous and important achievement.

I shall not go in detail through the figures on the increase in spending on the Metropolitan police grant because there is insufficient time. At this time of change, we have extra numbers and resources going into the police and the situation is starting to move forward, which is something that it is important to place on record. At the same time, as part of that substantial process of change, we have a renewed commitment by the leadership of the police in London to high-visibility policing, because the issues raised by the hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and for Twickenham about the fear and importance of crime—even in their relatively crime-free constituencies—are correct. It is right to say that we must establish a presence because people are concerned about crime. It is necessary to deal with it in a direct way, which is why the police are taking many initiatives in that area.

There was publicity in today's papers about a decision, of which the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey will be aware, in the London borough of Southwark to locate police officers in schools in that part of the city. It has been advertised as the first such scheme in Britain, although it is not actually the first. Last week I was in Clapton, where the police have opened an office in a secondary school in the middle of a low-crime area, which means that they will be circulating around that school. A series of similar initiatives are being developed up and down the country, but I pay tribute to what the Metropolitan force is doing in that area.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I thoroughly support that initiative. It is hugely important that young people going to, and at, school can feel that it is a place of safety and that they are not under threat from other pupils or those outside. If we have to do it; we have to do it—for as long as is necessary.

Mr. Clarke: That is absolutely right. It is not only schools; police are being located in libraries, housing offices and so on because we acknowledge that to have police located around the community is an important means of building strength and support for the kind of partnerships we need.

Not least in the litany of change, which includes the establishment of the MPA, the new leadership of the deputy commissioner, the change of boundaries, the establishment of borough commands, the increased resources and the development of the focus on visibility, is the diversity agenda, to which the hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton and for Twickenham referred. It is important and it is beginning to change the situation. Specials are being recruited and we have set a target to increase their numbers significantly because I agree with the important criticisms that have been made in that area, not least those that concern the need to seek recruits from ethnic minority communities.

There is an enormous agenda with a difficult history. The important task of reforming the human resources and finance functions of the Met in order to establish basic information about what is happening will not be easy. However, the leadership of the force is driving such changes through, which is something that I welcome and congratulate. The recruitment standards issue and form filling for expenses are classic examples of their kind, where things that have gone on for years are now being steadily changed. Indeed, the tenure system is another excellent example and it is being reviewed for the exact reasons that the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) mentioned in her interventions. We must get community-experienced police officers staying in posts so that they can influence and strengthen communities. Changing that enormous service is not easy. It requires a great deal of commitment by both the police and Government, but it is something that we are offering and seeking to implement.

Manpower, the specific subject of this debate, is an important element, but it is not the only element because nobody believes that the issue is sterile. The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who is a colleague of the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire, told me in discussion on national television—he probably was not watching because it would have been boring for him as he knows the subject so well—that she concedes that the policing issue involves not simply numbers but the quality of policing and how it operates.

I shall conclude by correcting the hon. Gentleman on crime. The Commissioner has made it clear that the total number of notifiable offences in the 12 months to 31 March 2000 decreased by 2.2 per cent. Crime in London has fallen. Burglary is down by 9.5 per cent. Vehicle crime is down by 0.2 per cent. and in Richmond, I gather that it is down by 9.9 per cent. Street crime has increased, and we are focusing on that in the various initiatives that we are introducing, but crime is going down. That is the way in which our policies have been working. They are making a difference. I am the first to acknowledge that there is a great deal more to be done, but we will do it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I congratulate hon. Members on a well-informed and constructive debate, but we must now move to the next debate, on an alternative route for crossrail.

Crossrail

12.30 pm

Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Canning Town): I am grateful to have secured this important Adjournment debate. I would not be so foolish as to expect the Minister to be able to give a definitive response to the points that I will raise, notwithstanding the respect that I have for him and for his ability to grasp important and complex issues. I hope, however, that he and his Department will accept that I, and those putting forward the same point of view, have a strong case, worthy of consideration.

That case is to argue that the new crossrail link's eastern end should run further south than the route originally proposed: south of Stratford, running through Canary wharf, the royal docks, Barking and Dagenham and on to Purfleet. I have no pecuniary interest to declare, but I should point out that I am chair of the Thames gateway all-party parliamentary group. That is the area affected by the proposition under discussion.

I seek to address the question of how to deal with London's prospective growth. That question has not really been asked for decades—it has not had to be. However, London is now growing again, gaining jobs and facing tremendous pressure on housing. It needs a transport infrastructure to service it. The problem of accommodation for key workers is an essential element of the housing stress and must also be solved.

We must combine spatial and economic development with a workable transport plan, bringing the key issues together. The decision that I am discussing today is the most important since the end of the second world war. It is about access: not just to places but to jobs, opportunities and homes.

The Minister responsible for regeneration at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has constantly argued that we need a key to access all the deprived areas of the Thames gateway. The plan that I shall put forward for consideration does that by serving south London and north Kent as well as docklands, east London and Essex. It addresses the areas of greatest deprivation, therefore providing the greatest opportunities. The main spine for east London is the A13 trunk road, but it will not be able to carry the volume of traffic expected in years ahead. The route that I propose is only a mile from the original study.

At present, the east end of crossrail—I shall deal only with its eastern end—is proposed to go from Liverpool Street to Stratford and on to Shenfield. The plan has been around for some 15 years and was first promoted when Stratford was expected to become the regeneration and employment hub of east London. The plan has been gathering dust while east London has been gathering momentum. Stratford is, and will continue to be, an important centre, not least because of the proposed channel tunnel rail link. It has, however, become neither the regeneration nor the employment hub.

It is to the Government's credit that they have grasped the nettle that crossrail will happen. We must maximise the advantages that crossrail will bring to the capital. However, the reality of what has happened in east London has been different from the expectations of 15 years ago. I shall refer to specific figures later. The real regeneration and employment hub has not been Stratford. Canary wharf, Exel, London City airport, the university complex and Norton Pharmaceuticals have joined Tate and Lyle and others. It is docklands that is the real hub. Stratford, which the Docklands light railway and Jubilee line termini have already enhanced, is still an important area. However, at present more than 60 trains an hour pass through it during rush hour, and I wonder whether it can cope with additional capacity.

I ask the Minister to look at the figures for potential development. According to consultants' calculations, the total development for the southern route through Canary wharf, the royal docks, Beckton, Barking Reach, Dagenham dock and Purfleet could exceed 40 million sq ft, if I may be forgiven for using the imperial measurement. However, development for the Stratford to Shenfield line could be as little as 10 million sq ft. Housing developments such as that at Barking Reach are very much in line with London's Mayor Livingstone's announcement on Monday that east London can provide the brownfield sites necessary to accommodate London's increasing population.

The London Mayor and the Government agree that, if London's population does grow to the latest estimate of about 8 million, and if we are to protect the green belt, we need more housing on brownfield sites. They also agree—thankfully, they seem to agree on quite a lot at the moment—that east London has the necessary sites, but we must ask how those sites will be accessed. That is a particularly important question to answer if we are to build for the densities that are being discussed.

According to the study by the Centre for Economics and Business Research that was commissioned by Canary Wharf Ltd. some two years ago, we can expect docklands to generate between 110,000 and 165,000 jobs in the next 10 to 15 years. However, the Jubilee line and the Docklands light railway cannot take the strain that that will impose, and nor, as I have said, can the A13. We need not only to ensure the public transport infrastructure necessary to service commercial developments but to attract more inward investment for brownfield sites. We know that work is under way further to develop the Greenwich peninsula, but standing as it does in the shadow of Canary wharf, it could well suffer from a lack of transport infrastructure, which could deter further investment.

Equally, the development potential of the riverside areas of Barking and Dagenham will not be realised without further public transport investment. The connection with the channel tunnel rail link at Purfleet will relieve pressure on the European link to St. Pancras, create additional capacity and provide alternative routes to London. It will also provide fast access to London and the City from the east.

Challenges have been made to the suggestion of a more southerly route. For example, it has been said that extra costs could be involved, but they could be vastly outweighed by the extra benefits. The estimated cost of the entire project is about £7 billion, and the construction of a southerly route might add only £800 million to that figure. It is also argued that a southerly route would not address the potential of the Lee valley and the opening of the route to Stansted, but nor, I would argue, would the Shenfield route. Stansted is important to the development of east London, and it is clear that the various arguments must be explored. However, we must recognise that, whichever route is chosen, certain options will not be covered.

Whether it proceeds along the original route or the more southerly one that I am proposing, crossrail needs to built within the anticipated time scale of 10 years. However, I would argue that both routes are possible, even if there is a change in favour of the more southerly route.

I thank Mr. Robert John, of Canary Wharf Ltd., for bringing the matter to my attention. I also thank Mr. Chris Glaister, of Glaister's, and Mr. Peter Twelftree, of Steer Davies Gleave, for their briefings, and Mr. John Biggs, our hard-working member of the London Assembly, for his thoughts on the matter, which, as always, proved helpful. Historically, east London has been the poor relation of this great capital city, but that has been changing for more than 20 years. We need river crossings—that case has been well argued, and I am sure that the Minister is familiar with it—and improved transport links, of which crossrail should be one of the most important.

The Mayor of London has put forward his 15-year plan, and the Government have their long-term plans to eliminate social exclusion and child poverty and to create more opportunities. They argue for economic competency with social compassion, stability without boom and bust and a head and heart approach. East London has a pivotal role to play in ensuring the success of both the Mayor's and the Government's strategies. It was the vision of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and others that docklands and the Thames gateway could play their full parts.

Crossrail will be important to the success of any strategy—the question is whether we want it to be central. There are already capacity problems on the docklands rail and public transport network, which must be addressed if we are to fulfil sustainable regeneration potential. Failure to do so would be a failure to match the expectations about the new gateway area as a motor of economic growth for London and the south-east—and, for that matter, the United Kingdom—and could even stifle that important growth.

As I said earlier, this could be the most important decision since the war. My request is that those responsible for making it give the southern routes full and fair consideration.

12.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) on securing the debate and providing the Chamber with an opportunity to discuss the proposals for cross-London rail links. This is indeed an opportune time for such a debate. Last Thursday, the Government announced key strategic decisions, showing their determination to provide London with the major new passenger rail capacity that the capital needs over the next decade or so. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's warm welcome for that announcement. He is absolutely right—it is an historic decision.

It is important for me to start by reiterating the details of the announcement, which was made after my hon. Friend secured the debate. Work will start immediately on the project definition and design development of a central cross-London rail link, the tunnel section of which could follow the alignment of the crossrail scheme. The work will look at alternative service patterns and will lead to a recommendation on the option to be taken forward. For the purposes of my speech, I shall call the scheme crossrail—since everybody else does—but it is not necessarily identical to the old crossrail scheme that was proposed some 10 years ago.

The work will be taken forward jointly by the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that that, along with the decision to undertake a feasibility study into the south-west to north-east route, is a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to the development of rail schemes in London. It is a first step, and there is much work to be done to identify the best options, but Thursday's announcement represents real progress towards providing London with a world-class rail network.

It will be helpful if I set the work in the context of the Strategic Rail Authority's report. In December 1999, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister asked the SRA to carry out a review of the issues relating to rail travel on an east-west axis across London. The report concludes that London is near to capacity in terms of the current national rail network, the central termini and the underground. That infrastructure, even supplemented by committed schemes, will not deliver the capacity to meet expected growth in passenger and freight demand over the next decade or so. The report recommends the consideration of a package of schemes of varying sizes and impacts to overcome those problems and to create a railway network that is appropriate to London's status as a world city.

In producing the report, the SRA took as a priority the identification of schemes that provide significant additional capacity in the central area to reduce congestion, to improve access and network capacity in key regeneration areas, to support the development of a network of strategic interchanges, to provide effective routes and operating conditions for freight and to provide fast and effective access to and from Heathrow. The report shows that there is little opportunity to provide the significant increase in capacity required to support the forecast growth by upgrading the existing system. Schemes for upgrading existing routes by lengthening platforms, increasing frequencies and building additional track were all considered, as were plans to link the Circle line to the national network. None of those could deliver sufficient new capacity. The report concludes that new cross-London links are required, probably along the protected corridors of the crossrail from Paddington to Liverpool Street and the Chelsea-Hackney line.

Since the beginning of the year, the Government, with the mayor and the SRA, have been considering the SRA report. Apart from the report, a large number of national schemes are being progressed or proposed in the London area. They range from relatively minor track improvements to major schemes such as the Thameslink 2000 scheme and the crossrail proposal. None of the schemes stands alone; they all have interfaces with one another. In most cases, they interface

[Mr. Keith Hill]

with the London Underground or bus routes and interchanges. They need to be taken forward in a co-ordinated manner.

While recognising the statutory powers and responsibilities that fall to the Mayor and the SRA, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Transport set up a high level group to ensure clarity on objectives and priorities. The group aims for the development of a co-ordinated strategic approach to London rail projects in general, and to oversee programme co-ordination for work on the projects. It has a formal tripartite structure and is chaired by my right hon. and noble Friend with the Mayor and the chairman of the SRA. The announcement on Thursday followed the group's consideration of the further appraisal of the SRA report.

The purpose of the project definition work is to identify the precise scheme to be taken forward. There are a number of potential routes for the central tunnel, and more particularly for national rail destinations. There are also a number of chain service patterns that need to be examined more thoroughly before we decide on the optimum scheme. In the east, that will include an examination of options to serve the Thames gateway, the Lee valley and other destinations in east London. The approach used to assess options on destinations served will be based on a wide range of parameters, including costs and various benefits such as regeneration, accessibility, environmental benefits, relief of overcrowding, journey time improvements and fare box revenue. Extensive consultation will take place with local authorities, regional development agencies and other interested parties before any decision is made. I can assure my hon. Friend—I know that he will welcome this—that plenty of opportunities will arise for alternative routes to be considered as part of the project definition work. That work will lead to a recommendation from the SRA, TFL and the high-level group.

The heart of the project, which will now be developed, is the construction of a new tunnelled route through the centre of London. Although that alignment could be similar to the crossrail proposal, with new stations at Liverpool Street, Farringdon, Tottenham Court Road, Bond Street and Paddington, the position of the portals and the design of the stations are very likely to be different. The current designs for the central area section of crossrail are held by London Underground, which is responsible for safeguarding the alignment. Existing suburban rail services could be linked across London using the tunnel, perhaps with services to Romford and Shenfield in the east, and to Ealing and Reading in the west.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: My hon. Friend said that there would be full opportunity for representations to be made during the project definition work. Forgive my ignorance, because this may have been included in last week's announcement, but will those suggestions be called for or will they have to be volunteered, and is there a time frame for that opportunity?

Mr. Hill: Now that I have made it clear that there will be a consultation stage, it will certainly take place. I reassure my hon. Friend that that was always the intention. I shall write to him providing the details about the time scale and how the opportunity will develop, so that he, other hon. Members and other interested parties in his constituency and in the docklands area can take advantage of it.

I was speaking about the opportunities that will arise for existing suburban rail services. The proposals that we are now considering would allow the Great Western main line and Chiltern line to connect to the Great Eastern main line and the London, Tilbury and Southend line, now known as the C2C. Crossrail could also serve Heathrow airport. However, all that is to be confirmed in the project definition work. The Government have allocated £150 million to fund the costs of crossrail project definition and design work.

The SRA believes that a crossrail link would have the highest proportion of travellers who would benefit from fewer interchanges; that it would be likely to generate the least short-term disruption to established travel patterns; that it would be best at supporting regeneration, given its penetration of west London, and that it could be brought into operation more quickly and with the least risk. A crossrail link would provide a major boost to the development of London's integrated transport network by providing a substantial increase in rail capacity in central London. It would improve access to and across the central area from many parts of east and west London. It would serve both the west end and the City, giving direct access for business, social and leisure travel within a wide area of Greater London.

A crossrail link would provide interchange at nine underground stations and at many stations on the national rail network. By removing the need to change from rail to underground at Paddington and Liverpool Street, a crossrail link would provide new opportunities for journeys to and through central London. It would also reduce crowding on several underground lines and busy stations. It would complement Thames Link 2000 services, if approved, with an interchange at Farringdon, thereby giving access to the north and the south and an interchange with the possible Hackney south-west line, which would be provided if the scheme were to be pursued.

Journey times would be 30 minutes from Slough to the City, 11 minutes from Paddington to Liverpool Street and 20 minutes from Ilford to Bond Street. Such a link would also benefit many road users whose journeys would be improved because of the more attractive rail services. It would provide a high quality of service both on trains and at the new stations and bring wider economic benefits to London. The route would also serve a significant number of regeneration development sites, including the Park Royal area, Paddington, the lower Lea valley at Stratford and the Thames gateway. Stratford, in particular, would be a key interchange station for the regeneration of the Thames gateway.

The construction of completely new infrastructure would allow features such as full access for mobility impaired people to be included as an integrated part of the design. The project definition and design development work will take about 14 months and will lead to a recommendation on the option to be taken forward. It is a major project and no decisions have yet been taken about the most appropriate process for seeking powers. At such an early stage, it is difficult to estimate when the construction of a crossrail link, if approved, may begin, but it is unlikely to be before 2005-06. The aim is for the link to be operational by the end of the year 2010, but it might be later depending on how long it takes to obtain the necessary powers and planning consents.

Increased capacity and the provision of new services are essential if we are to meet our targets for passenger growth and keep London and Londoners moving. I am delighted that the SRA, TFL, Railtrack and London Underground are working together to deliver the transport system that is fit for our capital in the 21st century. I hope that the vision that I have set out today for improved services will become a reality at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): The debate has ended a few minutes early. I regret that, in the absence of the Minister who is to reply to the next debate, I shall have to suspend the sitting until 1 o'clock.

12.53 pm

Sitting suspended.

Anglo-Irish Relations (Official Documents)

1 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I am privileged to have the opportunity to speak on the issue. Documents released during the past two years and, indeed, this year in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom under the 30-year rule have intensified suspicion of the involvement of the Republic of Ireland in assisting the formation of the Provisional IRA and supplying it with arms.

It will be noted that I refer to an intensifying of suspicion. I do so because contemporary opinion was highly suspicious of the activities of the Republic's Government, and justifiably too, when one casts one's mind back to speeches such as Jack Lynch's on 13 August 1969. He strongly implied that his Government would no longer be in a position to continue in the role of a mere spectator of events in Northern Ireland. There was also the movement of troops to the border areas. Such moves by that Government fuelled the disturbances in Northern Ireland and entrenched a residual suspicion that has never been dissipated. The 1970 arms trial in Dublin and subsequent hearings of the public accounts committee there not only failed to create the desired transparency in the events of that time but further clouded the amassed knowledge of the dealings and transactions that took place. There is an obvious need for transparency and an obvious requirement for accountability.

Victims of a generation of Provisional IRA violence in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, as well as the citizens of the Irish Republic, have the right to know precisely the involvement of Ministers of the Fianna Fáil Government in the formation of the equipment of the Provisional IRA. That right to know is regardless of the motive of any of the Ministers involved. Whether an internal power struggle took place in Fianna Fáil or the policy was a means of containing the unrest within Northern Ireland is a secondary issue. The primary issue is the actions and level of participation of those involved. Anglo-Irish relations continue to be damaged because of this issue. The current Irish Government can never hope to win the trust of British citizens in Northern Ireland without transparency and closure on this issue and others, such as Garda collusion.

Good relations north-south and east-west require a level of confidence in the Irish Republic's Government that can be achieved only by their adopting a more reflective, mature approach. They must pursue the twin goals of transparency and accountability rather than the regressive goal of damage limitation. Unless such actions are taken, the current Fianna Fáil Government may find itself viewed with the same justifiable suspicion as its 1970 predecessor. We must have detailed knowledge of the precise roles played by Charles Haughey, the then Finance Minister, Neil Blaney, the Minister of Agriculture, and military intelligence through Colonel Hefferon and Captain Kelly, in creating and equipping the Provisional IRA. We must be in a position in which to gauge the level of knowledge of Minister of Defence Gibbons, Minister of Justice O'Morain and the Taoiseach Jack Lynch in initially acquiescing to the arms operations and then the manipulating of their political show trial.

[Mr. Roy Beggs]

We know that the Government sub-committee on Northern Ireland policy headed by Blaney and Haughey disbursed vast sums that reached those who were to become the Provisional IRA in Belfast. We know that military intelligence agitated for a split in the republican movement and there is no doubt that assurances of financing and aid encouraged and facilitated the decision to split from the IRA command structure.

Regrettably however, the involvement of particular individuals in Government is less accurately documented and those involved have not been held to account. Official Government papers released in the United Kingdom have strongly indicated the opinion of the UK Government to the goings on in Dublin. The letter written by the British ambassador in the Irish Republic to the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, is but one example. In reference to the arms trial, the ambassador wrote:

> "Whatever the verdict, if Mr. Haughey was not part of a conspiracy, he was at any rate up to the neck in a scheme to import arms illegally".

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The passage quoted by my hon. Friend should be underlined. Like me, he would want to congratulate the ambassador on having had such a precise and accurate picture of what was going on. Is he not somewhat disturbed at current media comments in the Irish Republic, where some journalists and others are trying to cast aspersions on Prime Minister Lynch's colleagues, who clearly broke with the Haughey faction? Is it not good to have this statement which clearly states Haughey's position? Does he agree that some Dublin journalists are trying to blacken Gibbons and Lynch to exculpate the Haughey faction, and that such a form of historical re-writing is to be deprecated?

Mr. Beggs: I thank my right hon. Friend for that constructive intervention. He knows that I want to focus attention on those on whom responsibility lies for much of the trouble that we have all endured. It is not my intention to afford an opportunity for journalists to divert attention elsewhere, away from those who are culpable and guilty.

In the Irish Republic, the documenting of secret sessions of the public accounts committee reportedly has coded references to those who had control over the bank accounts used to distribute the £100,000 of so-called aid—a considerable sum in 1970. The Government papers that have been released strongly indicate the authorised omission of evidence by Minister of Justice, Dessie O'Malley, and his Department's apparent tampering with the witness statement of Colonel Hefferon. That deleted evidence implicates the then Minister of Defence, James Gibbons, much more than the mere "vestigial knowledge" that he admitted at the trial.

Of course, it was necessary for Gibbons to be adjudged clean with regards to the scandal—as Minister of Defence, he could have rendered importation of arms legal by mere involvement. Coupled with the release of the Berry papers, conflicting with the evidence given by the secretary to the Minister for Justice at trial, these documents create not so much a whiff as a stench of cover-up—that is cover-up, not stitch-up. It seems that many of those currently in the Republic who take an interest in this undoubted crisis both then and now for Fianna Fáil Governments, do so with a view to vindicating Haughey, Blaney and others by the persecution of Lynch, Gibbons and O'Malley, to whom my right hon. Friend referred. Those new sources give weight to a theory that a selective prosecution of individuals was necessary to mask the deep-seated rot in Government policy and involvement with Northern Ireland with an irresponsible pandering to an ideological notion of nationalism.

What we all must remember, and what may have greatest impact on Anglo-Irish relations, is that even if Mr. Haughey and those who can only be termed his co-conspirators were wrongly prosecuted—possibly, persecuted, as some have suggested—it does not prove an absence of participation on their part. The wrongful aspect was that all those involved were not put on the stand with them, or that the policy was not illegal as it was sanctioned from top to bottom, and that the Fianna Fáil Government of the time had institutionalised enthusiasm for creating and arming the Provisional IRA.

In the interests of progress and the improvement of Anglo-Irish relations, it is essential that new information relating to the arms crisis of 1970 be fully examined and evaluated and that such examination be carried out by a broad independent public inquiry in the Republic of Ireland. That inquiry must not only narrowly assess the dubious circumstances of the prosecution of Haughey, both Kellys and Albert Lyukx. It must be an inquiry into the wider scandal—scandal is the correct term.

The inquiry must investigate the actions of Fianna Fáil Ministers who, if they did not act as mother to the Provisional IRA, acted as a midwife at the birth of the organisation by funding northern republicans through links forged by Captain Kelly with his namesake in Belfast and by transferring moneys through the Irish Red Cross Society.

The inquiry must also focus on the actions of individuals such as Blaney and on whether his cross-departmental control over Kelly and instruction of Gibbons was a sanctioned delegated power. It must consider the extent to which Blaney and Haughey's joint dictation of policy on Northern Ireland was implicitly approved throughout the Cabinet.

The 1970 arms trial verdict can be dismissed as easily as the jury in that trial accepted the republican rhetoric that was used to defend those who were clearly engaged in importation.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Beggs: I would prefer not to do so.

There has never been accountability or transparency on this issue. More than 3,000 victims in over a quarter of a century deserve better. It is impossible to predict what would have happened had encouragement and support not been given to the then potential Provisionals. However, the inability to make concrete predictions does not negate the duty of the British Government to secure transparency and accountability on behalf of murdered and maimed citizens.

It is on that basis that I urge the Minister to make representations to the Government of the Irish Republic requesting an independent inquiry on this arms issue in order to ensure that Anglo-Irish relations—east-west and especially north-south relations—are not further harmed by lack of closure. If relations are to progress and not regress, the southern Irish state must come clean, and the circumstances of the 1970s arms scandal and trial must no longer be denied and concealed.

1.15 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) on securing the debate. I welcome the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Government, and I listened with real interest to what he said. I share the belief that in order to comprehend the present or mould the future, it is first necessary to understand the past. Therefore, in the Irish context, it is important that these papers have been released and are being studied. They form an important part of the backdrop to subsequent events.

However, I contend that the prime significance of the papers lies in the fact they have been published, without delay beyond the norm, and that they are now available to inform public debate. The evidence for that is here, because they form the basis of today's debate. The hon. Gentleman would agree that it is a sign of the maturity of the bilateral relationship between Britain and Ireland that both countries are willing to confront history, and learn from it.

The papers tell us about events that happened 30 years ago. It is right that those events should be known and discussed, and I understand why they provoke such a strong interest and response from the hon. Gentleman, his colleagues and many people in the island of Ireland. However, it is important to make the distinction between history and current events, and nothing that we learn from the papers detracts, or should be allowed to detract, from the progress that has been made.

The hon. Gentleman called for an inquiry. If new information emerges about events that occurred in the United Kingdom jurisdiction, the possibility of further inquiry is kept under review, as a general rule. However, it appears that the events to which the hon. Gentleman referred took place, or allegedly took place, under Irish jurisdiction and, therefore, are matters for the Irish Government.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I follow the point that the Minister makes, but he will recall that there are public inquiries in Northern Ireland, which is in the United Kingdom, that were requested by the Dublin Government. Therefore, it is consistent for the United Kingdom Government to request the Dublin Government to hold a public inquiry into the matters under discussion today.

Mr. Wilson: The right hon. Gentleman makes his own point. Whether to hold inquiries on any matter under the United Kingdom's jurisdiction is a matter for the United Kingdom Government. Similarly, any inquiry into matters under the Irish jurisdiction is a matter for the Irish Government. I am sure that the remarks of the hon. Member for East Antrim will have been heard in Dublin and elsewhere.

Mr. Maginnis: Further to that point, I would not want the Minister to avoid the issue, but will he tell us whether he will make representations to the Irish Government so that even-handedness can be seen? I shall not go into the fact that our own Government of the day must have had some information about what was going on, but the Government of today have the same responsibility to their citizens of Northern Ireland as to their citizens elsewhere throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Wilson: I strongly endorse the hon. Gentleman's last point. Obviously, exactly the same rules for jurisdiction would apply to citizens anywhere in the United Kingdom, as I am outlining in the example. The British Government have fulfilled the responsibilities that hon. Members would expect of them by ensuring that the papers were released under the 30-year rule, and are stimulating public debate such as is occurring today, which has flowed from the publication of the papers. Equally obviously, the Government of Ireland are aware of that debate and will arrive at their own decisions on where to take it.

It is important to put Anglo-Irish relations—for obvious reasons, I prefer "British-Irish" relations, but we shall not quibble about the semantics—in context. I understand the specific nature of the debate to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but it is important to recognise what is going on at present. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland recently said, Northern Ireland is a better and more prosperous place in which to live than it was three years ago, never mind 30 years ago.

In a debate at this time, it is incumbent on me, as a representative of the Government, to emphasise that now is the time to complete the Good Friday project, which means people pushing politicians to complete the job that they asked us to do three years ago. The great progress that has been made in recent years in resolving outstanding issues relating to Northern Ireland has allowed the United Kingdom and Ireland to develop a wider and deeper relationship so that we no longer constantly view each other through the single dimension of Northern Ireland. In a way, the significance of the documents that we are discussing is to remind us what happens to such relationships without that co-operation between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. That is not merely of historical significance but is a relevant reminder in the present-day context.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Minister's distinction between British-Irish and Anglo-Irish, but the reality is that we seem to be dealing with an Anglo-Irish agreement. In that context, he may remember what he said about learning from history. History repeats itself. That same Dublin Government today has arms dumps and an army operating in the Republic, contrary to their own constitution. I ask again whether the Government will make representations to the Dublin Government for an inquiry.

[Mr. Wilson]

Mr. Wilson: The debate relates to a specific subject and I do not want to widen it out. There is excellent security co-operation between the United Kingdom authorities and the Irish authorities, and I have no reason to suppose that the Irish Government countenance illegality on the part of an element that would threaten the democratic stability of Ireland just as it would threaten that of Northern Ireland. I do not believe that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman would say that that is true of the present Irish Government, whatever happened in the past.

On making representations, I believe that the documents stand alone; they are in the public domain. The British Government have fulfilled their responsibility and have not evaded it any more than the Irish Government have. When documents emerge, or are published by Governments, that inform public debate and tell people what happened or shed light on events that happened 30 years ago, an inquiry into them should not be automatic. At some point we must move forward rather than always relying on history.

Mr. John D. Taylor: I return to the basic point. The Dublin Government made representations to the present UK Government about a public inquiry into the Bloody Sunday episode in Londonderry city. The Government complied with that request. Why can that not work in reverse? Why can the present Government not make representations to the Dublin Government about a public inquiry into the funding of the Provisional IRA by Haughey and others?

Mr. Wilson: Mr. Winterton—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. One title that I have in this place after 30 years is that of Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Wilson: I unreservedly apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The distinction that the right hon. Gentleman draws is wrong. A Government can make representations to another Government on any subject. However, the implication that the Bloody Sunday inquiry was held because of representations by the Government of Ireland is not a logical extension of that principle. Representations can also be made within a jurisdiction.

I will not move from that position. The debate is taking place, and light is being shed on the matter, because of the maturity of the relationship between Britain and Ireland. That is also the reason why the documents could be published. Older documents concerning the relationship between Britain and Ireland have never been published, but that is a separate matter. It is an important advance in the relationship between the two countries, and especially in their willingness to face up to past events and to the causes of their differences, that documents that are historic in terms of the 30-year rule, but contemporary in terms of the interest that they provoke and the emotions that they arouse, have been published without any delay after 30 years. I hope that that will continue to be standard practice.

Mr. Beggs: I recognise the benefit that is accruing from the release of such information. However, will the Minister state that he shares my concern that there might be good reason to believe that evidence was tampered with, and that there are serious omissions in the information that is being released? Or is he so worried about damaging the good relations that are proclaimed between our Government and the Irish Government that he is incapable of confidently expressing to the Irish Administration that the time has come to clear the matter up and to bring the truth into the open so that what happened can be fully exposed?

Mr. Wilson: As the alleged events took place within the jurisdiction of the Irish Government, and they have serious potential implications for the Irish state, it is for them to determine whether another inquiry is required. I will make no further comment, except to state that the matter has been investigated in the past, and that it is up to a British Government to determine whether events that occurred within their jurisdiction require investigation.

Mr. John D. Taylor: I agree with the Minister. The Dublin Government should make the decision on the matter. That is not under challenge. However, the Dublin Government successfully requested that the British Government establish a public inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday and apologise for the potato famine. Therefore, we want the Minister to ask the Dublin Government to set up a public inquiry into the dreadful affair that caused so much unhappiness, bloodshed and death in Northern Ireland for 30 years.

Mr. Wilson: It is absolutely certain that famine does not discriminate in terms of class or creed—or, at least, certainly not in terms of creed. The potato famine affected every part of Ireland, so political jurisdiction is not an issue with regard to that.

I am not prepared to allow the premise to be established that the Bloody Sunday inquiry was established at the behest of the Irish Government. There were good reasons within the United Kingdom for that inquiry to take place, and it is going ahead on that basis. Although they are being a little ungenerous, I understand the motivations of the hon. Members who are focusing on demanding that representations be made to the Irish Government, rather than on acknowledging the achievement of the British and Irish Governments in releasing information without which the debate would not be taking place. That is an important advance, both in terms of informing legitimate debate on such topics and events that have resonance down to the present day, but it is also a demonstration of the confidence and maturity of the relationship between the British and Irish Governments that that step can be taken. On that basis, we should be learning from the past. We should be interested in such events and the lessons that we can learn from them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have run out of time and must move to the next debate, on Northwood and Pinner community hospital.

Northwood and Pinner Community Hospital

1.30 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to slip under the wire and raise an issue that is important to my constituents in what, I am told, is the last debate initiated by a Back Bencher in Westminster Hall before the dissolution.

Northwood and Pinner community hospital is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who is in his place today, but it is of considerable importance to my constituents. It is potentially a key location for new, extra intermediate care provision, which could benefit not only my constituents but people in the north of Hillingdon. From meetings that I have chaired, attended by Hillingdon health authority, local residents' associations from Harrow and Harrow West primary care group, I know that Hillingdon health authority is in sympathy with that idea.

I seek from today's debate and from the Minister recognition of the need for ministerial pressure on the London region of the national health service and on Hillingdon health authority to translate that sympathy into detailed planning and the subsequent modernisation of Northwood and Pinner community hospital.

A key finding of the national beds inquiry, published in February 2000, was that

> "at least two of every 10 days spent by people aged over 65 in acute hospital beds could be better provided in alternative facilities such as intermediate care beds".

The NHS plan published in July 2000 took forward some of the inquiry's conclusions, outlining what intermediate care might include. It promised an additional 5,000 intermediate care beds with an extra £900 million of investment by 2003-04

> "in new intermediate and related services",

precisely

> "to promote independence and improve quality of care for older people."

I do not want all of those 5,000 intermediate care beds at Northwood and Pinner, just a small number.

The Department of Health, in a circular in January this year, said that

> "intermediate care should form an integrated part of a seamless continuum of services linking health promotion, preventative services, primary care, community health services, social care, support for carers and acute hospital care."

It went on to say that intermediate care services, if not provided in a patient's own home, should be provided in "community-based settings" and, crucially, should be "discrete, step-down facilities" in comparison with the services largely provided by acute hospitals.

Intermediate care is good not only in itself but for the wider modernisation of services in the NHS. It could, for example, help Northwick Park hospital to continue to end problems that it has had with bed blocking. That would help to speed up services for those who most need acute hospital care there as well as providing better care for those who no longer need an acute hospital bed.

I want to set out some of the context surrounding Northwood and Pinner community hospital. Three key developments in the past six years now impact on some of the issues that affect it. Mount Vernon hospital, some one and a half miles from Northwood and Pinner community hospital—a district general hospital until 1995—lost its accident and emergency unit and its paediatric beds under the previous Government. I and other Harrow Labour councillors vigorously opposed those moves before the 1997 election.

In 1998, perhaps not surprisingly, given the attitude of the royal colleges to specialist services being provided at hospitals that are no longer district general hospitals, Hillingdon health authority proposed to move burns and plastics specialist services from Mount Vernon hospital to Chelsea and Westminster hospital. Following considerable public opposition to the proposal, although the move of burns and plastics services from Mount Vernon has been confirmed, they will instead move to Northwick Park hospital, the main district general hospital serving my constituents. I am pleased that the move will keep excellent clinical teams together.

An almost unnoticed feature of that debate was Hillingdon health authority's offer of new community hospital facilities in north Hillingdon to augment existing provision, which Harrow residents were assured would also be available to them and their GPs.

Another key element of the background picture is that the Government's health reforms were being implemented at about that time. They enabled individual high-quality GP practices to band together to form a primary care group and have much greater input into and say about the structure of local health services.

In addition, following the merger with Central Middlesex hospital, the new management team at Northwick Park is beginning to change the culture of a hospital that has always offered generally excellent care once people are under the surgeon's knife, but has not always been known for the quality of its basic administration, the openness of its management or its customer care. I am referring to the part between the GP saying, "You need an operation", and its taking place. That was coupled with an infrastructure that was starved of resources. For example, the accident and emergency unit, which had needed modernisation for at least the past 10 years, helped to give Northwick Park a reputation that few would envy.

Now, however, there is a sense of things changing. The Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), opened a completely refurbished accident and emergency unit several weeks ago. New intensive care beds have been provided, and maternity is next in line. Crucially, the strong new management team is much more willing to engage with the concerns of local GPs and residents and, more relevant to this debate, to contemplate providing specialist clinics closer to patients.

In my constituency, a high-quality primary care group is keen to develop intermediate care facilities and take advantage of the promise of modern expanded community hospital provision. Ideally, it can access high-quality clinician support from a changing and modernising Northwick Park hospital. Where better to

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

begin the process of developing intermediate care options than at Northwood and Pinner community hospital, which is no more than 500 yd from my constituency and has considerable local public support?

Northwood and Pinner community hospital was opened on 2 December 1924. It was built on land donated by a local family on the condition that it was used for a community hospital or retirement home. The hospital was built with money given by local people, much of it by weekly subscription. Many of their descendants still live in the area and take an active interest in the development of the hospital, which they rightly regard as partly theirs.

Back in September 1983, Hillingdon health authority decided to close the hospital to compensate for a £1 million overspend. As we can imagine, there was a massive outcry from the local community about a decision that was condemned by the entire hospital staff. They were joined by local business and community groups, local churches, all local residents associations and Brunel university medical group. On 26 October 1983, recognising the considerable support for Northwood and Pinner community hospital, those groups occupied it. They locked the front and back doors and excluded all non-medical management staff. The hospital continued to treat patients but under the management of clinicians and the local community. It was occupied 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with pickets outside protesting at the planned closure and the Conservative Government's running of the national health service.

The occupation had the support of almost the entire community. Local businesses sent food, milk, money and equipment. A carol service, which was led by a local councillor after the hospital's chaplain had refused to take part, attracted 200 people, including the writer and actress Mollie Weir, who had lived in Pinner and knew the community hospital well. I was told that she made a special point of travelling across London to give her support. The protesters eventually took Hillingdon health authority to court after it insisted on the closure, and the High Court found in favour of the protestors. Lord Chief Justice Woolf said that the health authority's actions had been wrong and awarded costs against it.

I pay tribute to the leadership of Councillor Keith Toms, who is now deputy leader of Harrow council, who organised a highly successful campaign. Mike Turner, who now chairs a local health watchdog, Community Voice, described it as one of the few cases in the 1980s when a community forced a health authority to keep a hospital open. I continue, rightly, to be pressed by local residents, general practitioners and councillors—not least Keith Toms, but also Councillor Gillian Travers, who I am delighted is challenging the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood at the coming election.

There have been various attempts since 1983 to move forward with other developments at the Northwood and Pinner community hospital. Six years ago, the London region allocated £300,000 to build a new two-storey building on the site, but, in its wisdom, Hillingdon health authority decided to build those new premises in south Ruislip instead. Despite such setbacks, the community continues to support Northwood and Pinner community hospital through a friends of the hospital group. It has continued to give many thousands of pounds to purchase special beds and baths, and other important patient facilities. The community hospital, working closely with the health centre next door, provides 10 respite care beds, four of which are used by Harrow GPs, 13 elderly care beds, GP admission beds, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and chiropody.

Those facilities, together with the Northwood health centre, are provided in buildings that are:

"overcrowded, poorly organised and in need of major refurbishment".

Those were the words of a feasibility study published on 10 April 2000, which was in a report that was prepared for Hillingdon primary care group and Harrow and Hillingdon Healthcare NHS trust. Since then, preliminary costings have emerged in media reports, with talk of a refurbishment programme costing upwards of £8 million. That figure has not surprised local people, GPs or horrified health authority experts. To the frustration of local people, particularly GPs in the north of my constituency, and despite that excellent original feasibility study, the detailed planning for a refurbished Northwood and Pinner community hospital has not taken place.

The hospital offers an excellent opportunity for my constituents to see their GPs delivering intermediate health services that are neither purely primary care nor best delivered in a district general hospital setting. It is local, accessible and strongly supported by the community. Harrow GPs already have access to beds, but they want to see more short stay beds in order to help more Harrow people move from acute hospital back home. In addition to clinician support from Northwick Park hospital, they see no reason why there should not be outpatient clinics for endoscopy, low-tech dermatology, or ear, nose and throat. Why not expanded physiotherapy and chiropody services too? They also want the opportunity for local GPs with specialist skills to deploy and develop those talents further by providing clinics at Northwood and Pinner community hospital.

The refurbishment plans for Northwood and Pinner seem to have had a lengthy gestation period. That is due in part to a wider review of Hillingdon's health economy and the detailed work that the health authority is doing on the implications of the national beds inquiry for intermediate care in its area. I have excellent individual GPs. They want a refurbished and modernised Northwood and Pinner community hospital to provide the intermediate care options alongside a virtuous circle of a strong primary care group and a slowly improving Northwick Park hospital, the local district general hospital.

That vision is supported in my constituency by most of the health care fraternity and local residents. I look now to my hon. Friend the Minister to provide some much needed push to the London region and to Hillingdon health authority to get on with the detailed planning for the modernisation of this important community asset.

1.45 pm

The Minister for Public Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing this debate, especially as it is the last Back-Bench initiated debate in Westminster Hall this Parliament. It is also gives us an opportunity to discuss the future of a local community facility that is greatly valued by the people who use it. My hon. Friend made a strong speech in support of the local community hospital, but also gave a powerful description of the views of local people. The views of the GPs in the area will clearly be important in the future direction of local services, particularly when the primary care trust will have such an important role.

Northwood and Pinner community hospital has 34 in-patient beds and is located in the London borough of Hillingdon. Although that is close to the border of my hon. Friend's constituency, it is actually in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who is also present today. Ten beds are provided for respite care and 13 beds are supervised by a local consultant physician for patients who may require rehabilitation and physiotherapy following an acute illness, and may be awaiting residential or nursing home placement. Seven beds are provided for Hillingdon GP access and four for Harrow, West GPs. The average length of stay for patients is 28 days.

The ownership of the Northwood and Pinner community hospital transferred to the Hillingdon Primary Care NHS trust when the PCT was established on 1 April 2000. Hillingdon PCT was a first wave trust, one of only two established at that time in London. It is therefore at the forefront of developing the new models of care for the 21st century NHS. The services at Northwood and Pinner community hospital continue to be managed for the present by Harrow and Hillingdon Healthcare NHS trust, but they are being progressively integrated with those run by the PCT. That is why we feel that the views of local GPs will be so important in determining the future direction of services.

The NHS in Hillingdon, in partnership with social services, is keen to implement an inclusive approach involving local community groups to review all its services, to develop new models of service, along with patient care pathways, which will be utilised to deliver the NHS plan. Proposals are being drawn up jointly between all partners, including an estates strategy for providing suitable premises and infrastructure for the services. The Northwood and Pinner community hospital site is an important part of the NHS facilities in the borough and is already providing some intermediate care services.

The PCT is working closely with health and social care partners in north Hillingdon and the local community to determine the future configuration of local services. I know that my hon. Friend will understand that Ministers cannot pre-empt the outcome of local discussions, but I can reassure hon. Members that any proposals for change will be discussed with the local community and, should changes to services be planned, they will be the subject of full consultation. I shall ensure that the points made so powerfully by my hon. Friend about the need for progress and direction are heard by Hillingdon health authority and by the other partners to the local debate. I reassure my hon. Friend that the Government are committed to making appropriate and effective use of community hospitals and see an important role for them in delivering local health care and in the future development of intermediate care. I shall follow discussions in the area with interest; we shall wait for local discussions and consultations to take place on the direction that the local community wants to take.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the hon. Gentleman, I tell the House that, typically and courteously, the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) sought the permission of the initiator of the debate, the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), of the Minister and of the Chair for his intervention.

Mr. Wilkinson: I should tell the Minister how much local people on both sides of the borough boundary appreciate any interest in a facility of high quality such as the Northwood, Pinner and district cottage hospital. Will the hon. Lady bear in mind the need for balance between the facility at Northwood and Pinner and existing facilities at Mount Vernon and at Northwick Park and Watford? There is hope that there may be opportunities at Mount Vernon for some community services.

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the future of services at Mount Vernon. It is important to take them into account and to ensure that there is proper local community discussion and support for their future direction. I undertake to ensure that the points made by the hon. Gentleman are heard by the local health authority and by partners to the debate locally.

The Government recognise the strength of feeling that people have for their local community hospitals, which include Northwood and Pinner, and the value of those hospitals as part of the community that they serve. In the NHS plan, we pledged that, as well as additional money, by 2004 there would be some 5,000 extra intermediate care beds, some in community hospitals, some in existing facilities, and some in new developments. As my hon. Friend made clear, community hospitals are not just about beds; they could be developed for ambulatory care services and as bases for local access to consultant outpatient advice and treatment. Too often in the past, such hospitals have been sidelined and their potential ignored. Now, with a new emphasis on intermediate care and on delivering care closer to home, there is an opportunity to breathe new life into community hospitals.

As hon. Members know, the national service framework for older people was published in March. That tasked the NHS and its partners to work together to develop modern services to meet the special needs of the older population. I understand that in Hillingdon, and in Brent and Harrow, that approach has been adopted in all service areas, including those for older people.

The Government, and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West, want further developments to proceed as quickly as possible. The modernisation of

[Yvette Cooper]

local services is in the interests of my hon. Friend's constituents. Local people expect and deserve a modern health care service in their area. It is important to get the right services agreed in the right place to meet the needs of local people. Thorough assessments are being made of local needs. It is also important to ensure that there is proper public consultation about changes, which should not be driven merely by the NHS in detachment from the local community. Members of the local community should have a proper opportunity to comment on any proposed changes. As hon. Members will know, the NHS plan made available £405 million of additional funds annually by 2003-04 compared to 1999-2000 for the NHS component of new intermediate care services to promote independence and improve the quality of care for older people.

The Government have already invested additional funds in excess of £100 million in the NHS in the past financial year to provide intermediate care services, in part to ease the pressures on acute care over the winter. Between them, Brent and Harrow and Hillingdon health authorities received extra investment of £1.3 million, which helped to ensure that long waits for admission at both Hillingdon and Northwick Park hospitals were kept to a minimum over the winter months. Those sums are part of an overall increase of more than £30 million, almost 9 per cent., for Brent and Harrow health authority and £15.7 million, or 9.35 per cent., for Hillingdon health authority for use in the current financial year. Indeed, in its plans submitted for the current financial year, Hillingdon health authority has indicated expenditure of £1.7 million on intermediate care services.

It is clear that there is support for expanding intermediate care services. My hon. Friend made a strong argument for the development of intermediate care services at his local community hospital, and we will follow that debate with interest and ensure that his comments are properly taken on board. We support the determination of hon. Members to obtain patient-centred services in modernised facilities for their constituents and to take advantage of all the opportunities that the NHS plan provides.

I look forward to a successful partnership between the statutory and voluntary agencies in the Hillingdon and Harrow, West areas to develop the future for intermediate care and other facilities, so that we can ensure that every patient—elderly patients and patients across the board—gets access to the modern, high-quality care that they deserve from the NHS.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I move the Adjournment, may I say to the Minister that I wish her well, whenever her happy event takes place.

I believe that Westminster Hall has proved of immense benefit, particularly to Back Benchers. Although I am showing a bias, I hope that the experiment of Westminster Hall will be continued in the new Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 10 May 2001

[Sir Alan Haselhurst *in the Chair*]

Creative Industries

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Touhig.*]

2.30 pm

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson): We warmly welcome the opportunity provided by this debate to highlight one of the best success stories in the United Kingdom. Until fairly recently, it has gone unsung, but thanks to the efforts of those in the creative industries, assisted by a supportive Government programme of action, it is now more widely recognised.

The term "creative industries" is now more widely used and understood. For too long, the view of our traditional cultural industries—those based on our long tradition of excellence in fields as diverse as literature, music, art and live performance—was that they were nice but not essential. They were often seen as elitist. It was too easy to dismiss their importance in enriching our quality of life, reflecting the vibrancy of our multicultural society and providing social cohesion and opportunity, but that analysis was wrong. If we consider what lies at the core of those industries, it is surely intellectual property.

We can all get our heads around widgets, but are we so comfortable with concepts and ideas? That is what we are talking about today. As we look at the shifts in our economy from manufacturing in the 19th century, to services in the 20th century and knowledge and information in the 21st century, one constant strand has been the UK's strength in original creativity. We are well known for our innovation and inventiveness, but we have not been so good at developing and maximising the potential benefits in the value chain. Too often, other countries have reaped the benefits of our original creativity.

Our need to maximise the benefits of our creativity lies behind our effort to support the creative industries—those industries that have original creativity at their heart and the potential to maximise revenue and generate employment through the exploitation of intellectual property. There was no clear strategy for engaging with those industries before we came to government. That is why the Prime Minister invited the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), to set up the creative industries taskforce.

The taskforce's first job was to raise awareness of the importance of those industries, and to measure their contribution to the UK economy. Its findings in 1998 were updated earlier this year, and the figures that emerged surprised us all. The industries generate revenues of about £112 billion, export earnings of some £10.3 billion, provide employment for some 1.3 million people, account for more than 5 per cent. of GDP and, perhaps most important, are growing at twice the rate of the economy as a whole. They will be the source of many of tomorrow's new jobs, many of which will be highly skilled. They are industries in which the UK has a strong international reputation. We have a rich cultural heritage, and a reputation for excellence not only in the performing arts but in design and computer games. Moreover, in an information age, we have the added advantage that English is the first language of the internet.

For all those reasons, creative industries matter. That is why the Government have taken steps to work with them, to understand the challenges that they face and to develop solutions. It quickly became apparent that better careers advice on those industries was essential. We therefore set up a creative industries higher education forum to ensure better relations between education and the workplace, and opened a web portal, which provides access to information and advice on a wide range of intellectual property issues and averages 85,000 hits a week. We have undertaken more focused export promotion support and co-ordinated the efforts of many Departments and Government agencies to improve awareness at national, regional and local levels of the importance of the creative industries.

In the English regions, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, there is growing recognition of the importance of the creative industries for wealth and job creation, of their contribution to social inclusion and regeneration strategies and of the way in which they foster creative talent and encourage those who are excluded to enter mainstream economic activity. The creative industries also make a substantial contribution to our regional economies. In London, they employ more people than does the manufacturing sector, and, in Manchester, they employ more than construction does.

We want to put creativity at the heart of education to encourage our children to develop their talents. That is why, last July, we allocated £40 million for the creative partnerships initiative to bring together schools, arts and other creative organisations and to provide improved opportunities for every schoolchild in 16 deprived areas. Our culture online initiative will help to open up arts and culture to new audiences. It aims to give schoolchildren and lifelong learners easy access to museums, galleries, arts organisations and libraries. Information is presented alongside explanatory materials to enrich the learning experience.

The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts also actively contributes to the development of the creative industries. NESTA supports networking and business advice events for the new generation of cultural entrepreneurs in partnership with the Institute of Contemporary Arts and The Lighthouse in Scotland. It is helping to nurture the creative skills of pupils in a host of different areas, such as design and technology, animation, computer games, engineering, product design, drama online, music performance and fashion, to name but a few.

The contribution of the creative industries is quite astonishing. Clusters have sprung up throughout the United Kingdom, often around university towns, such as Sheffield, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cardiff and Bristol. One example from Bristol clearly illustrates how fast these industries have developed. Aardman Animations produces "Wallace and Gromit" and recently produced

[Janet Anderson]

its first full-length feature film, "Chicken Run", which was very successful. Aardman Animations started 10 years ago with about 15 people and now employs about 500. That is why the Government have taken steps to make people aware of the potential of the creative industries and to do what we can to assist them.

2.37 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I hope that I do not appear too uncharitable when I say that Conservative Members are a little surprised that the Government have chosen not to discuss tourism in a debate on one of the areas of responsibility of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. I am equally surprised that, given the opportunity to debate the creative industries, no Liberal Democrat Members have bothered to grace us with their presence. We all understand why attendance is thin, and I will not detain hon. Members too long. However, one or two matters must be aired.

I suspected that the Government had called the debate to discuss the document "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", which was published on 20 March. I have read it twice, and it appears to be something of a wish list. However, its intentions and objectives are right, although we do not agree with all the recommendations.

Focusing my remarks on what the Minister said, I want to talk about two important areas. The first is the regulatory and business environment in which these important creative industries have to operate. The Minister made clear reference to that in her opening remarks. The business community, of which the creative industries are a part, has been swathed in red tape and suffered increased regulatory burdens during the past four years. Today the British Chambers of Commerce has issued a challenge for the election to the leaders of the three main parties on the £15 billion of extra regulatory burdens that have been placed on business. Creative businesses, just like others, are affected by those burdens.

I recommend the British Music Rights website to the Minister. The site includes a detailed review of the regulatory burdens affecting the music industry, in which music publishers, composers and songwriters tend to be small to medium-sized enterprises. Those businesses feel particularly aggrieved about the need to understand and comply with existing and new requirements on employment tax, national insurance and data protection rules. Various other taxes affect them, including withholding tax and taxation of intellectual property rights royalties, although, in fairness, they appreciate the current moves to simplify that matter. Many of those who design websites will be affected by IR35. That is one good example of the regulatory burden that the creative industries face.

Another large tome on the subject is the creative industries' mapping document. All Members of Parliament should examine it, because I found it fascinating to see the extent to which those industries have grown in the past few years. That augurs well for the future and highlights the importance of the design industry in the UK. I declare a past interest, in that I was once the director of a graphic design business. We know that fashion design is an important sector, and the design of goods generally is one of the main focuses of current arguments about parallel trading.

The regulation and business cost implications of any proposals to permit parallel trade worldwide must be considered. We understand and sympathise fully with the need to ensure that consumers are not ripped off. However, in the past two days the British Brands Group has written to me—I am not sure whether this letter has gone to all MPs—pointing out that, contrary to what the press said at the time, the recent and welcome price comparison study published by the Department of Trade and Industry does not make the case that changing trademark laws to allow worldwide parallel trade would reduce prices to consumers. It would shift profits from manufacturers and designers to traders and could make prospects for the UK textile industry, which is already in decline, considerably worse. I know that the Minister's constituency has a long-standing interest in that area.

The UK textile industry is increasingly a high-value, added-value industry and is dependent on creative design. Designers and manufacturers of high-quality products can ill afford additional cost burdens, and they can ill afford to lose their intellectual property rights. The Minister rightly said that those involve difficult concepts, because very often they appear to be intangible. However, we must protect those rights. This debate is a good opportunity for us to place those concerns on the record.

The second issue is skills. That, too, has copyright implications. Thanks to the British Music Rights website, which I commend to the Minister and to all hon. Members who take the trouble to read the *Hansard* report of this short debate, we know that many of Europe's young people know how to play software games, download music and surf the net. However, do they realise that they could be creators, songwriters or website designers, and use their leisure skills to obtain employment and income? It is vital for Europe to convert such talent into productivity and to equip the next generation with the skills to create content and to exploit it.

The key is to re-evaluate approaches to intellectual property policy, particularly to copyright. The culture that regards free content on the net as a legitimate consumer right cannot be allowed to continue. It might appear to be free at the point of consumption, but it cannot be free in the pirated sense. Everyone in the music industry welcomed the decision in the United States courts in the case of Napster. We have also seen the adoption of the European Parliament's amendments to the copyright directive, clarifying the restrictions on private copying. Copyright is important. It enables creators and users of intellectual property to support themselves and their businesses by their artistic work, and creative entrepreneurs to generate profits to reinvest in tomorrow's creators. Those were clear objectives of the Government's 10-year preview.

The Green Paper rightly emphasises the significant role that education and training play in nurturing and fostering creative talent. Many of the creative industries have identified and complained of a serious skills gap. Although we agree on the objective, it is a cause of grave concern that creative activities such as art, music and technical design have been marginalised by an over-prescriptive national curriculum. I shall not prey on your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by outlining our alternative education policy. However, I believe that children should be exposed to the arts and to culture from an early age and that, as teenagers, they should have the opportunity to see to what extent a career in the creative industries might be right for them. Proposals for widening participation and access must focus on the understanding and appreciation not just of culture and the arts but—and I am not sure that the Green Paper addresses this—of the creative activities that underpin so much of the success of business and commerce: design, graphic design, new technology, advertising and publishing.

The Minister mentioned the culture online initiative. She knows that we have considerable concerns about that, and we look forward to discussing the issue again in the new Parliament—should we be the Government, the discussion would be relatively short. We have always recognised that the creative industries are supremely important. It is clear that in the century ahead they will assume ever greater importance in the domestic and global economies. The key role of government is to create the business, cultural and artistic environment in which creative industries can flourish; the Conservative party is committed to that.

2.48 pm

Janet Anderson: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will reply to the debate.

I thank the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) for his contribution. I too am surprised and disappointed that the Liberal Democrats have not seen fit to send a representative to the debate. Like the hon. Gentleman and me, the Government recognise how important the creative industries are. He referred to some of the regulatory and business burdens on those industries. He will, of course, know that the Government set up the better regulation taskforce to keep a close watch on how regulation was affecting the industries in question, which include the creative industries.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the views of British Music Rights. It was to keep in touch with the music industry that we set up the music industry forum, which meets regularly under my chairmanship and that of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. However, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that intellectual property is a key aspect of this issue. That is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry and a group in the Department, under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs, has been studying it. We shall continue to monitor the situation and to do what we can to reduce burdens on the relevant industries.

The Green Paper "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years" looks forward to a future in which individual creative talent is, from childhood, given the support that it needs to flourish; in which artists and cultural institutions are freed from bureaucratic controls; and in which freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture is available to all. The Green Paper emphasises the importance of childhood encounters with the arts, both at home and, of course, at school. It includes pledges to give every school pupil the chance to work with creative professionals and organisations, by extending the creative partnership scheme so that it operates nationwide; to give every child in primary school who wants it the chance to learn to play a musical instrument—as a pianist I welcome that; and to bring every public library in the country online by the end of the year.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for the Green Paper and I look forward to further discussions and debates with him when we return in a few weeks.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 8 May 2001

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160048]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160036]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* In total, two special advisers have worked at any one time in the Foreign Secretary's Department from 1997 to date:

Andrew Hood: May 1997-December 1999

David Clark: May 1997 to date

Michael Williams: February 2000 to date.

Rio Conference

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to assist the preparations for the Rio+10 conference; what contributions he intends to make at the conference; and if he will make a statement. [159780]

Mr. Battle: As my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has stated in his reply of today (UIN15779), the United Kingdom is taking a leading role in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in South Africa in September 2002. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is actively engaged in these preparations.

Once the agenda for the summit has been agreed, we shall decide on how best to contribute.

European Court of Human Rights

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the average length of time was between a case referred to the European Court of Human Rights and a judgment in a case in the last 12 months; and when he expects a judgment in the cases of *(a)* Leyla Zana, *(b)* Selim Sadak, *(c)* Hatip Dicle and *(d)* Orhan Dogah. [160383]

Mr. Battle: The new European Court of Human Rights came into existence on 1 November 1998. The Court has set itself the objective of reaching a final judgment on the merits of a case within two years of that case being introduced. However, due to the considerable backlog of cases that the new Court inherited from the previous European Court and Commission, the Court is not at present in a position to meet that objective. The Government have provided additional assistance to the Court to help in clear that backlog. The majority of cases that do not go for judgment are decided within one year.

Judgments are expected shortly in the cases of Leyla Zana, Selim Sadak, Hatip Dicle and Orhan Dogah, and probably by the beginning of June.

Colombia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he will make to the Colombian Government over the recent threats made by Army and paramilitary personnel against the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado. [160641]

Mr. Battle: We are concerned about the recent threats that have been made by armed groups against the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado. Representatives of Peace Brigades International and Christian Aid met officials from the Latin American and Caribbean Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 5 and 26 April respectively to discuss this problem, and what further steps might be taken to protect the Peace Community and other vulnerable groups in Colombia.

The British embassy in Bogota has raised our concern about the safety of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community with the Colombian authorities, most recently with the Head of the Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor-General's Office on 24 April. We have been promised a response soon.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he will make to the Colombian Government concerning the rights of the peace communities in Colombia not to be intimidated by military and paramilitary units. [160642]

Mr. Battle: As I made clear in my statement on 13 February, we are very concerned about the increasing levels of violence in Colombia, and the threats and intimidation that continue to be directed against the civilian population, including the peace communities.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office visited Colombia again in March in order to support the Colombian Government's efforts to advance the peace process and protect human rights. She repeated the concerns that we both raised with the Colombian Government during our joint visit in September 2000 about paramilitarism, and strongly urged the authorities to increase their efforts to tackle paramilitary groups. On 20 April, I wrote to the Colombian Ambassador in London reiterating our concern about the human rights situation in Colombia, especially with regard to the protection of vulnerable groups, paramilitarism, and bringing members of the armed forces linked to paramilitaries to justice.

China

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Chinese Government following the arrest of Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang, together with priests and followers; and if he will make a statement. [160167]

Mr. Battle: We have raised our concerns about the reported detention of Bishop Shi Enxiang on 27 April with the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, and will continue to follow this case closely.

We regularly raise concerns about the harassment of Christians in our Human Rights Dialogue with China, the latest round of which was held in Beijing on 12–14 February. We made it clear that such harassment was unacceptable and not in keeping with the provisions of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which China signed in October 1998.

Discrimination against Women (UN Convention)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what obstacles remain to his signing the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. [160322]

Mr. Battle: The UK ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1986 and is fully committed to its implementation. The Optional Protocol to the Convention was opened for signature on 10 December 1999. In 1999, following a review of our obligations under international human rights treaties, the Government concluded that priority should be given to the Human Rights Act 1998. The Government would prefer to give the Act, which has been fully in force only since 2 October 2000, longer to bed down before returning to the question of whether our citizens need an avenue of complaint to the UN human rights committees. The Home Secretary has said in a recent letter to the Law Society that we can return to the issue later in the year, but cannot give a precise timetable just yet.

Animal Welfare

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent discussions he has had with the Chinese Government concerning animal welfare. [160074]

Mr. Battle: We have made clear to the Chinese authorities the British public's opposition to the exploitation and cruel treatment of animals in China.

The UK is at the forefront of international efforts to protect animals. We are closely involved in the work of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). We support the work of non-governmental organisations in the field of animal welfare.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Colin Griffiths

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Solicitor-General if he will make a statement concerning the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service not to prosecute any person arising out the death of Colin Griffiths. [160360]

The Solicitor-General: A full investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Griffiths' death was undertaken by the Staffordshire police. The findings of that investigation have been carefully reviewed by a senior lawyer in the Casework Directorate of the Crown Prosecution Service. In addition, advice has been taken from experienced, independent counsel. Both have come to the firm conclusion that there is insufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction against any person arising out of the tragic death of Mr. Griffiths. Mrs. Griffiths has been informed of the decision and she has also had a meeting with the CPS lawyer during which the basis of the decision was explained to her.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total cost was of employing special advisers in her Department from 1997 to date. [160040]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Khabra: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the Commonwealth Development Corporation's recently published annual report. [160732]

Clare Short: For the year 2000, CDC made a pre-tax operating surplus of £72.3 million. However, after provision on its investment portfolio of £133.4 million it made an overall loss of £61.1 million before tax (£51.5 million after tax).

With regard to its investment policy in the year 2000, CDC exceeded the target of directing 70 per cent. of investments by value to poorer countries. However, in 2000 it again did not meet the aim of directing 50 per cent. of its investments by value to Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. CDC is focused on meeting this aim in 2001.

CDC made important progress during last year to establish the basis for a beneficial public-private partnership that will demonstrate that it is possible for private investors to make adequate returns in poor countries in a socially responsible way.

Copies of CDC's annual report and accounts have been placed in the Library of each House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Appeals

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases since 1 May 1997 in which Dr. Abou-Amer was the examining medical practitioner the decision maker's ruling on entitlement to benefit has been overturned on appeal. [160612]

Mr. Bayley: The information is not available. Neither medical services nor the Benefits Agency keep records that identify which examining medical practitioners were

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involved in individual cases. The appeals service does not record details of the examining medical practitioner involved in cases coming to appeal.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the inspection report of the benefit fraud inspectorate in respect of Kingston upon Hull city council. [160725]

Mr. Rooker: The benefit fraud inspectorate (BFI) has produced an assessment report in respect of Kingston upon Hull city council. The report was published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

The inspection coincided with my right hon. Friend's announcement on the setting up of an Expert Help Team to help local authorities improve their benefit administration. The council offered to be the first local authority to work with the expert help team.

BFI therefore produced a short assessment report to help the council identify the extent of deficiencies in key areas of benefit administration and security, and to help inform the focus of the expert help teams visit.

This report identifies a range of problems that hinder the delivery of an efficient service and notes the council's commitment to improve, demonstrated by some encouraging work including the introduction of the verification framework and a good claim form designed in line with BFI guidance.

I commend the Council for its openness, good work and on-going effort undertaken in conjunction with the expert help team to improve its standard of administration and counter-fraud activity.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of people affected by *(a)* disallowance of JSA for failure to comply with actively seeking work, or availability for work tests, *(b)* JSA sanctions of a discretionary length, *(c)* JSA sanctions of a fixed length, *(d)* JSA sanctions arising from failure to comply with New Deal requirements, *(e)* JSA sanctions arising from failure to co-operate with the Child Support Agency and *(f)* Income Support sanctions arising from failure to co-operate with the Child Support Agency. [160284]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

People claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) subject to disallowances or sanctions as at 30 November 2000

Thousand

Sanction/disallowance type	*All claimants*	*JSA (IB) in payment on hardship grounds*	*No JSA in payment*
All cases	27.5	6.0	21.6
Disallowed—availability for work/not actively seeking employment	0.6	[1]0.1	0.6
Sanctions for failure to comply with New Deal requirements	0.5	—	0.5
All other sanctions/disallowance	26.4	5.9	20.5

[1] Figure is subject to a high degree of sampling error and should be used only as a guide to the current situation

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred

Sources:

Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 2000
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 2000

As at 30 November 2000 there were 12,100 people claiming Income Support with a reduction in benefit due to their failure to supply the CSA with the name of the father of their child(ren).

Winter Fuel Payments

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims submitted *(a)* prior to 31 December 2000 and *(b)* since 1 January for the Winter Fuel Payment from men aged between 60 and 64 years are unresolved; and if he will make a statement. [160092]

Mr. Rooker: Sixty-six claims prior to 31 December 2000 and 249 claims since 1 January are unresolved. In all these cases, further information has been requested in order to determine the claim.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people missed the March deadline for applying for a Winter Fuel Payment for 2000; and if he will impose a similar deadline for applications for winter fuel payments relating to earlier years. [158714]

Mr. Rooker: Around 1.3 million people have made successful claims for Winter Fuel Payments in respect of winter 2000 out of a possible 1.5 million people that might have been eligible. We have received 252 claims since the deadline.

There are no immediate intentions to impose deadlines on claims for payments for past winters.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples have weekly incomes below (i) £80, (ii) £85, (iii) £90, (iv) £95, (v) £100, (vi) £105, (vii) £110, (viii) £115, (ix) £120, (x) £125, (xi) £130, (xii) £135, (xiii) £140, (xiv) £145, (xv) £150, (xvi) £155, (xvii) £160, (xviii) £165, (xix) £170, (xx) £175, (xxi) £180, (xxii) £185, (xxiii) £190, (xxiv) £195 and (xxv) £200. [158793]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The information is in the tables. Although the income bands for couples reflect the proposed structure of the pension credit, they should not be used to estimate numbers of pensioners who would be eligible. This is because they refer to total net income from all sources, including certain benefit payments which will not be taken into account when assessing eligibility for the pension credit. Also, the figures relate to a different time period.

Single pensioners below selected levels of income, 1998–99

Net weekly income	*Number (Thousand)*	*Percentage of all single pensioners*
Below £80	750	18
Below £85	890	21
Below £90	1,000	24
Below £95	1,140	27
Below £100	1,310	31
Below £105	1,510	36
Below £110	1,730	41
Below £115	1,960	47
Below £120	2,160	52
Below £125	2,340	56
Below £130	2,520	60
Below £135	2,640	63
Below £140	2,750	66
Below £145	2,850	68
Below £150	2,950	71
Below £155	3,050	73
Below £160	3,140	75
Below £165	3,220	77
Below £170	3,290	79
Below £175	3,340	80
Below £180	3,400	81
Below £185	3,470	83
Below £190	3,540	85
Below £195	3,590	86
Below £200	3,630	87

Source:
Family Resources Survey 1998–99

Pensioner couples below selected levels of income, 1998–99

Net weekly income	*Number (Thousand)*	*Percentage of all pensioner couples*
Below £80	—	—
Below £85	—	—
Below £90	—	—
Below £95	—	—
Below £100	—	—
Below £105	—	—
Below £110	110	4
Below £115	140	5
Below £120	190	7
Below £125	240	9
Below £130	290	11
Below £135	350	13
Below £140	400	15
Below £145	460	17
Below £150	530	20
Below £155	610	23
Below £160	680	26
Below £165	750	28
Below £170	810	30
Below £175	880	33
Below £180	950	36
Below £185	1,020	38
Below £190	1,080	40
Below £195	1,120	42
Below £200	1,180	44

Notes:

1. Single pensioners (non-cohabiting) are defined as men aged 65 and over or women aged 60 and over.

2. Pensioner couples (married or cohabiting) are defined as couples where the man is aged 65 or over.

3. Incomes are defined as net weekly income from all sources, before housing costs, expressed in July 1998 prices.

4. The numbers of pensioners are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and the percentages are rounded to the nearest 1 per cent though they are not necessarily accurate to that degree.

5. Estimates are based on survey data and are subject to sampling error. A dash represents sample sizes that are too small to provide reliable estimates. Extreme caution should be exercised when using these figures to estimate the number of pensioners falling within a given £5 band of income, since the resulting estimate may not be based on a sample size large enough to produce reliable estimates.

Source:
Family Resources Survey 1998–99

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update his estimate based on the Family Resources Survey 1998–99 of *(a)* median pensioner incomes, excluding means-tested benefits, by age, sex and marital status, consistent with his answer of 8 February 2000, *Official Report*, column 128W, on pensions and *(b)* the size of each group. [160282]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to this question on 16 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 790W.

Poverty (North-west)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* children, *(b)* adults and *(c)* pensioners lived in poverty in the north west in each of the years from 1997 to date. [160084]

Mr. Bayley: Poverty and social exclusion are complex multi-dimensional issues, affecting many aspects of people's lives—including income, health, housing, the quality of their environment and opportunities to learn. There is no single measure that can capture the complex problems that need to be overcome.

However, a number of these aspects have seen significant improvement in the north west since 1997. For instance, the proportion of children achieving at least level 4 at key stage 2 has risen from 63 per cent. in 1997 to 75 per cent. in 2000 in English. In maths the proportion rose from 63 per cent. to 73 per cent. The numbers claiming Unemployment Benefit have fallen by over 35 per cent. since the election to 125,000 in March 2001. Unemployment has not been as low in the north west since May 1975. The percentage of pensioners in 1998–99 in low income households in the north west Government office region was 24 per cent. on the before housing costs measure and 27 per cent. on the after housing costs measure. This is similar to the level for Great Britain as a whole.

The annual report, "Opportunity for all" (CM4865), available in the Library, sets out and monitors the Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Note:
Low income figures are based on 60 per cent. median measures (including the self-employed) for 1998–99 which are the latest figures available.

NIRS2

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average arrears payment and the average compensation payment made to people who have been victims of the problems with the NIRS2 computer system, broken down into claimants of each of the benefits affected. [160224]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The only reason there have been victims of the NIRS2 computer system is because of the terms on which the system was purchased by the previous Administration. We are dealing with the consequences to ensure people do not lose out.

Benefit	*Average amount of benefit arrears paid (£)*	*Average amount of compensation paid (£ p)*
Retirement Pension	323	12.20
Widows Benefit	1,665	29.97
Incapacity Benefit	305	19.55
Jobseeker's Allowance	381	31.44

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security broken down on an annual basis, how many claimants of each of the benefits calculated by NIRS2 have received arrears payments related to the problems with the computer system; how many have received compensation; and how many cases are still waiting to be reviewed. [160225]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* As at 31 March 2001, the Department had processed almost 98 per cent. of the 3.2 million referrals from NIRS2 since 19 April 1999. 66,880 cases remain under review, which is 8,000 less than at 28 February 2001.

Benefit	*Number of people whose benefit has been underpaid*	*Number of people who have received compensation*
Tax year 1999–2000		
Retirement Pension	94,942	197,933
Widows Benefit	9,936	19,081
Incapacity Benefit	3,980	2,055
Jobseeker's Allowance	1,019	161
Tax year 2000–01		
Retirement Pension	75,409	50,227
Widows Benefit	6,160	4,110
Incapacity Benefit	4,937	2,488
Jobseeker's Allowance	1,168	65

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners *(a)* received the Minimum Income Guarantee premium for those aged between 75 and 79 years and *(b)* how many received the premium for those aged 80 years and over broken down into single people and couples, and prior to the changes in April. [160220]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The position on premiums for the earnings related Minimum Income Guarantee prior to this April's changes is given in the table. The two lower rates of the Minimum Income Guarantee were abolished on 9 April and all claimants now receive the highest rate of £92.15 for a single person and £140.55 for couples. The number of pensioners claiming are expected to increase by 140,000 as they become newly entitled to the guarantee because of these increases and increases in the lower and upper capital limits.

Income Support claimants aged over 60 with premiums, November 2000

Thousand

Premium	*All claimants*	*Single claimants*	*Couples*
Higher Pensioner Premium			
Claimant/partner aged 80 or over	635.3	590.8	44.5
Claimant/partner aged 60–79	494.5	354.6	139.8
Enhanced Pensioner Premium			
Claimant/partner aged 75–79	142.6	130.4	12.3
Pensioner Premium			
Claimant/partner aged 60–74	354.9	286.6	68.3

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred and quoted in thousands.
3. Pensioner Premiums are paid at three rates depending upon age or disability and are paid in respect of either the claimant and/or their partner.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 2000.

Pension Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 153–54W, for what reason Pension Credit claimants were not included in the estimate of pensioners in receipt of means-tested support in 2003–04. [160230]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* We are still considering the overall design of Pension Credit in light of the consultation exercise. Final decisions have not yet been made on several policy areas which will have an impact on the number of pensioners entitled to the reward for saving. Estimates of the number of pensioners covered by Pension Credit will be published in due course.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons *(a)* qualified for the higher mobility rate of Disability Living Allowance and *(b)* participated in the Motability scheme, in each of the last five years. [159741]

Mr. Bayley *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The information is in the table.

Recipients of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance and participants in the Motability scheme

Thousand

Year	*DLA higher rate mobility component recipients*[1]	*Current Motability agreements*[2]
1996	1,253	299
1997	1,327	341
1998	1,346	366
1999	1,364	384
2000	1,409	392

[1] DSS Information Centre: five per cent. data

[2] Motability—includes War Pension recipients and Northern Ireland cases

Note:

Figures relate to 30 November

DEFENCE

Submarine Flotilla

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current status of the repairs to the submarine flotilla. [160686]

Mr. Spellar: The repairs to the SSNs recalled last October are progressing well. Although straightforward in engineering terms, the work has involved the development of engineering techniques. This has been given the highest priority and I am able to say that the repairs to HMS Torbay and HMS Tireless have been completed successfully. HMS Torbay remains in refit and HMS Tireless, sailed yesterday from Gibraltar to return to duty.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150558]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a very substantial number of personnel in the Bristol area: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled some 15,700 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian).

Since 2 May 1997, around 1,230 contracts with a total value of some £1,954 million were placed with prime contractors in the Bristol area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a welfare of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Bristol area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Bristol area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Bristol.

Departmental Policies (Bolton, West)

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bolton, West constituency, the effects on Bolton, West of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150603]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 5 March 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a large number of personnel in the north-west, a significant proportion of whom are based close to Bolton: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled some 2,700 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian).

Since 2 May 1997, around 440 contracts with a total value of some £332 million were placed with prime contractors in the Bolton area[1]. A contract was placed with Matra BAe Dynamics in February 2000 for the supply of Seawolf Block 2 missiles for the Royal Navy, and this good news for UK industry safeguards about 300 high skill jobs at MBD and its suppliers, including the Lostock MBD plant.

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a wealth of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Bolton area may well be done elsewhere, similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Bolton area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Bolton.

Departmental Policies (Warrington, North)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Warrington, North constituency, the effects on Warrington, North of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [152315]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 6 March 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence has wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a large number of personnel in the Warrington area: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled some 4,150 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian).

Since 2 May 1997, around 440 contracts with a total value of nearly £50 million were placed with prime contractors in the Warrington area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a wealth of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Warrington area may well be done elsewhere: similarly contracts placed with contractors outside the Warrington area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Warrington.

Departmental Policies (Don Valley)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to Don Valley constituency, the effects on Doncaster of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [153521]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a very substantial number of personnel in the Don Valley area: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled 620 personnel (service and civilian) on average during the period of interest.

Since 2 May 1997, nearly 160 contracts with a total value of nearly £2 million were placed with prime contractors in the Don Valley area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a welfare of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Don Valley area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Don Valley area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Don Valley.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the combined cost of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160053]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave him on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160054]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* During the period in question a total of four individuals have worked as special advisers in this Department, but no more than two have been employed at any time.

Richard King

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the result of the SIM investigation was into the death of Grenadier Guardsman Richard King during exercises at Sennybridge; what correspondence he has had with the families of the deceased soldier; and what time elapsed between the death of Guardsman King and his family being informed of the results of the inquiry. [159546]

Mr. Spellar: The investigation by the Royal Military Police special investigation branch into the death of Guardsman King concluded on 29 February 2000. As a result, eight senior non-commissioned officers and two junior non-commissioned officers were reported for neglect of duty. The Army Prosecuting Authority, an organisation similar in role to that of the Crown Prosecution Service and wholly independent of the chain of command, subsequently concluded that there was insufficient prospect of securing a conviction at a court martial to warrant trial.

The Secretary of State has had no direct contact with the family of Guardsman King, although officers from Guardsman King's unit have insisted the family and a number of officials from the Ministry of Defence have also been in correspondence with them. The associated Army Board of Inquiry was convened on 15 January 2001; it is still on-going and the family will continue to be informed of developments.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is routinely collected to monitor the use of plastic baton rounds. [159547]

Mr. Spellar: Information on plastic baton rounds fired by the Army is collected from a number of sources: the daily incident briefs (DIBs), brigade daily Northern Ireland reports (NIREPs) and plastic baton log reports. The information is held for internal use by Headquarters Northern Ireland, which also relays details of any baton round sage to the RUC as part of normal liaison activities.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 507W, if he will extend the table provided in order to record in each year since 1991, the number of *(a)* PBRs fired, *(b)* target hits and *(c)* injuries and fatalities. [159548]

Mr. Spellar: The only record we have of the number of targets hit since 1991 is the same as the number of injuries which appears in the table given in my answer of 13 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 507–08W.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the muzzle velocity is of the L21 A1 baton round. [158506]

Mr. Spellar: The muzzle velocity of baton rounds is normally measured 2m from the gun muzzle. At 2m, the average (mean) velocity of a sample of 360 L21A1 baton rounds fired from L104 guns was 71.4 metres per second (m/s).

DMSO Solvent Experiments

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 94–95W, regarding DMSO solvent experiments, if he will place in the Library copies of the two protocols which were submitted to the ethical sub-group of the defence scientific advisory committee medical committee and the minutes of the committee which relate to the discussion of these two protocols. [159803]

Dr. Moonie: I will arrange to have copies of the two protocols relating to the trials involving human volunteers and the solvent DMSO to be placed in the Library of the

House. However, the minutes of the ethical sub-group of the medical committee of the defence scientific advisory committee have, in line with Ministry of Defence policy, been sent to MOD defence records. I have arranged for them to be recalled and will then be in a position to consider their placement in the Library.

Porton Down

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 20W, on Porton Down, if he will place in the Library copies of each of the internal technical reports related to research involving Oripavine TL2636 identified by the chemical and biological defence sector of DERA at Porton Down. [159802]

Dr. Moonie: I will arrange to have copies of those reports on Oripavine TL2636 which have been declassified to be placed in the Library of the House as soon as possible. The remainder of the reports are currently being reviewed for declassification before they can be placed in the Library of the House. The report from the CW applications discussion group of the 17th Quadripartite CBR Conference is classified and I am therefore only releasing the section which refers to Oripavine.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 659W, on Oripavine, if he will place in the Library details of the evidence which suggests that following single acute doses of TL2636 there are no significant long-term effects on health. [159805]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to his previous question. In this response I stated that the Oripavine derivative TL 2636 is a member of the same group of drugs as morphine, and although there had been no long term follow-up studies specifically relating to this derivative, these drugs have been used clinically for many years. The evidence to which I referred is widely available in the open literature and I have placed this in the Library of the House.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ask the Medical Research Council to consult the Porton Down veterans support group regarding its advice on an independent epidemiological study for service personnel who took part in experiments at the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down. [160494]

Dr. Moonie: No. The Medical Research Council is already in contact with the Porton Down veterans support group and will consult with them as necessary.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates officials from his Department and the chemical defence establishment, Porton Down have held meetings with the Medical Research Council since 5 March regarding its advice on an independent epidemiological study for Porton Down volunteers. [160488]

Dr. Moonie: Officials met with representatives from the Medical Research Council (MRC) at Porton Down on 5 April 2001.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the regional distribution of his Department's spending in the last financial year. [160455]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Ministry of Defence is organised financially into top level budgets reflecting major outputs rather than geographical location. Expenditure records reflect this organisation and commodities purchased only.

While we do not record the majority of expenditure by region, defence expenditure on equipment by regions is detailed in table 1.9 of "UK Defence Statistics 2000", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Rapid Effects System

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the budget is for the future rapid effects system; and if he will make a statement. [160343]

Dr. Moonie: At this stage we are considering only whether to adopt the future rapid effect system; no dedicated funding has yet been allocated to it.

Warrior Upgrade Programme

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Warrior upgrade programme. [160340]

Mr. Spellar: The Warrior infantry fighting vehicle upgrade programme is currently in its concept phase. Technology and procurement options are being identified for further investigation during the assessment phase.

HQ 2 Division Relocation

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library the post-project evaluation of the relocation of HQ 2 Division from York to Edinburgh. [160339]

Mr. Spellar: The final stages of the reorganisation of Headquarters 2 Division have only recently been completed and we wished to see the new organisation established before conducting a post-project evaluation.

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armoured battlegroup support vehicles he will buy; and if he will make a statement. [160341]

Dr. Moonie: The armoured battlegroup support vehicle programme is still in the concept phase. A decision has yet to be made on the number of vehicles that we will procure.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many multi-role armoured vehicles he will purchase; and what compensation and other costs will be payable to other project partners if the UK buy is reduced. [160342]

Dr. Moonie: A review of the UK combat support vehicle requirement is currently taking place. It will not be possible to finalise the number of multi-role armoured vehicles required until this review has reported in late 2002.

The memorandum of understanding that governs the collaborative programme does not commit any of the three nations to production and makes no reference to specific production quantities. The issue of compensation payments does not arise.

Armed Forces Deployment (Ascot)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Armed Forces, and from which units, excluding special forces, will be deployed at the Ascot week races; and if he will make a statement. [160316]

Mr. Spellar: None. Security during Ascot week is a matter for the police, who are well trained and well equipped for the task. The Ministry of Defence will, of course, consider any reasonable request for support in those areas for which the police are not trained and equipped.

Chemical Agent CR

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 415W, on chemical agent CR, what form the aerosol version of CR took; and what authorisation was given for aerosol CR weaponisation as *(a)* spray, *(b)* grenade, *(c)* canister and *(d)* other. [160288]

Mr. Spellar: In both 1968 and 1973, CR was authorised for use in aerosol form as a hand-held squirt device known as a self-protection aid device (SPAD).

Information on authorisation for the development and subsequent production of differing types of CR weapon is not collated centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, authorisation for CR to be held in readiness for use has always been subject to ministerial approval.

Unit Histories

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates *(a)* 22 Squadron SAS, *(b)* 14 Company and *(c)* the Force Research Unit were (i) established, (ii) deployed and (iii) discontinued; what specific activities were undertaken by each of these units; and what the normal complement was of each unit. [160324]

Mr. Hoon: The designation "22 SAS Regiment" was first used in 1952, for a unit formed in 1950 for operations in Malaya. The regiment remains in being.

I am withholding the further information requested under exemption 1a of the code of practice on access to Government information.

Departmental Policies (Jarrow)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information, relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on Jarrow of his Department's actions since 2 May 1997. [153558]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a presence in the Jarrow area: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled around 910 personnel (service and civilian) on average during the period of interest.

Since 2 May 1997, around 100 contracts with a total value of some £33 million were placed with prime contractors in the Jarrow area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a welfare of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Jarrow area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Jarrow area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Jarrow.

Departmental Policies (Manchester, Gorton)

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Manchester, Gorton constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 14 November 2000. [154499]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a presence in the Manchester, Gorton area: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled around 600 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian).

Since 2 May 1997, around 1,360 contracts with a total value of some £250 million were placed with prime contractors in the Manchester area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a welfare of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Manchester area may well be

done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Manchester area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Manchester.

Departmental Policies (Truro and St. Austell)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Truro and St Austell constituency, the effects on Truro and St. Austell of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154528]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a large number of personnel in the Truro and St. Austell area: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled around 3,500 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (Service and civilian).

Since 2 May 1997, around 120 contracts with a total value of nearly £5 million were placed with prime contractors in the Truro area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a wealth of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Truro and St. Austell area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Truro and St. Austell area could lead to sub-contractors on companies in Truro and St. Austell.

Departmental Policies (Lincoln)

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Lincoln constituency, the effects on Lincoln of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [152981]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 20 March 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a large number of personnel in the Lincoln area: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled some 6,300 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian), mainly based at RAFs Waddington, Coningsby and Cranwell. The strong RAF support to the local area will be maintained in the future by the basing of the Eurofighter at RAF Coningsby.

Since 2 May 1997, around 330 contracts with a total value of nearly £38 million were placed with prime contractors in the Lincoln area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a wealth of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Lincoln area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Lincoln area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Lincoln.

Departmental Policies (Newbury and West Berkshire)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Newbury constituency, the effects on Newbury and West Berkshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154570]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 20 March 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a very large number of personnel in the Newbury and West Berkshire area: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled some 24,500 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian). This represents an increase of just over one-quarter since 1997. The Newbury area is home to many significant defence establishments including RAF Brize Norton and the Tidworth Garrison.

Since 2 May 1997, around 420 contracts with a total value of some £474 million were placed with prime contractors in the Newbury area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a wealth of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Newbury area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Newbury area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Newbury.

Departmental Policies (Lancaster and Wyre)

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Lancaster and Wyre constituency, the effect on Lancaster and Wyre of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154686]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 21 March 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a presence in the Lancaster and Wyre: within a 25-mile radius distance of the constituency, MOD direct employees totalled some 1,250 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian).

Since 2 May 1997, around 20 contracts with a total value of some £1.5 million were placed with prime contractors in the Lancaster area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000", which contains a welfare of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Lancaster area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Lancaster area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Lancaster.

Departmental Policies (North Devon)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North Devon constituency, the effects on North Devon of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [155905]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a presence in the North Devon constituency: within the constituency itself, MOD direct employees totalled around 930 personnel as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian).

Since 2 May 1997, around 215 contracts with a total value of nearly £38 million were placed with prime contractors in the North Devon and Bideford area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000" that contains a wealth of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the North Devon and Bideford area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the North Devon and Bideford area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in North Devon and Bideford.

Departmental Policies (Plymouth Unitary Authority)

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on the Plymouth unitary authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158028]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence has a wide-ranging presence throughout the UK in terms of defence establishments and the service and civilian personnel they employ. This presence brings benefits to many communities, local economies and jobs. Also, 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year that provide support to industry and create and sustain defence-related employment.

The Ministry of Defence has maintained a very large number of personnel in the area reflecting the strategic importance of Plymouth to the services—especially the Royal Navy and Royal Marines. MOD direct employees as of 1 October 1999 (service and civilian) were around: *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton—1,150 personnel; *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport—2,850 personnel; and *(c)* South-West Devon—850 personnel.

Since 2 May 1997, around 6,240 contracts with a total value of some £859 million were placed with prime contractors in the Plymouth area[1].

I draw attention to the Defence Analytical Services Agency report "UK Defence Statistics 2000" that contains a wealth of defence statistical information, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

[1] The decision as to where work under a particular contract will be undertaken rests with the contractor, therefore work on a contract placed with a prime contract in the Plymouth area may well be done elsewhere: similarly, contracts placed with contractors outside the Plymouth area could lead to sub-contracts on companies in Plymouth.

Helplines

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159505]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence administers a wide variety of telephone helplines to assist the public. Our primary public helplines for all general inquiries are the MOD public inquiry office helpline—telephone number 0870 607 4455; and the Welsh language public inquiry office helpline—telephone number 01154 821 413.

We also administer a number of helplines to provide advice to the public on specific subjects. The main helplines are:

Helpline	*Telephone number*
The Low Flying Helpdesk	020 7218 6020
The Veterans Advice Unit	0845 602 0302
The Gulf Veterans Advice Unit	0800 169 4495
The Medical Assessment Programme Helpline	0800 169 5401
The Porton Down Volunteers Helpline	0845 603 9140
The Meteorological Office Helpline	0845 300 0300
The Defence Vetting Agency Helpline	01904 662644
The Defence Suppliers Service Helpline	0117 913 2844
The Defence Diversification Agency (DDA) Connect Helpline	0845 600 1221
Defence Estates Work Services Opportunity Bulletin Helpline	0121 311 2067

The table does not include those helplines created specifically for recruiting purposes, nor for serving military and civilian personnel and their dependants. Nor does it include helplines that may from time to time be administered by individual units or establishments to provide advice on local issues.

Scottish Brigades

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies his Department has undertaken into the reduction of Scottish brigades from two to one. [160338]

Mr. Spellar: There have been no studies undertaken by this Department into a reduction in the number of brigades in Scotland.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158550]

Ms Beverley Hughes: During the period 31 March 2000 to 31 March 2001, special advisers in this Department travelled overseas on seven occasions.

Access to Hastings Study

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to make an announcement regarding the outcome of the Access to Hastings study. [159197]

Mr. Prescott: Ministers are considering the recommendations made by the South East England Regional Assembly, and an announcement will be made when that consideration is complete.

London Underground

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the total Government investment in London Underground was in each of the last 10 years. [157467]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Government provide grant to London Transport. Although the major part of this has been allocated to London Underground, the grant has also been used for investment in non-Underground activities such as bus and river services, and Croydon Tramlink.

The last Administration's 1996 Budget spending plans covered the period up to 1999–2000, at which time annual grant to London Transport (including non-Underground services such as buses and Tramlink) would have fallen to £161 million. An additional £1 billion of grant has been provided to London Transport by this Government for investment in the Underground.

Government funding, together with London Transport's own revenues and investment through Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deals, supported the following total levels of investment in the Underground over the 1990s.

£ million at cash prices

Year	*Government grant to London Transport*[1]	*Core investment (including JLE)*	*Private finance investment*[2]	*Total investment in Underground (excluding JLE)*	*Total investment in Underground*
1990–91	484	414	—	414	455
1991–92	575	298	—	298	360
1992–93	883	632	—	632	699
1993–94	693	485	—	485	740
1994–95	786	506	—	505	877
1995–96	904	485	114	599	1,187
1996–97	944	371	138	509	1,166
1997–98	629	324	161	485	961
1998–99	411	415	53	468	751
1999–2000	816	342	179	521	1,176
2000–01[3]	404	395	150	545	545

[1] Excludes grant to Docklands Light Railway in years 1990–91 and 1991–92, and retained scale proceeds from disposal of bus companies in year 1994–95

[2] The PFI figures are not actual amounts the private sector is investing in London Transport. Instead they are London Transport's estimates of what investment in PFI projects would have cost had they done the investment themselves

[3] The Underground Own Investment figure for year 2000–01 is not directly comparable to earlier years. The figure shown is the forecast outturn of London Underground Ltd.'s projects programme, and reflects their adoption of the accounting standard Financial Reporting Standard 15, which excludes capital renewal works.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on *(a)* train, *(b)* signal and *(c)* track failures in each financial year since 1994–95 for each line of the London Underground and the cumulative figures for all lines. [159435]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* Further to previous questions from the hon. Member on 21 December 1999, *Official Report,* column 523W, and 12 May 2000, *Official Report,* columns 483–84W, London Underground have been pursuing the question of standardisation of data on failures. They have now been able to confirm a breakdown on a line by line basis. Any variations from previously published figures are a result of this clarification.

Service disruption due to failures in:	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Trains						
Non LT	76	140	92	167	249	134
Bakerloo	1,028	1,216	1,075	1,144	1,237	879
Central	2,121	1,739	2,605	2,423	2,165	2,304
District	1,532	1,218	1,160	1,082	995	981
Jubilee and East LL	1,135	1,156	922	1,239	2,376	1,722
Metropolitan and Circle (c&h)	1,741	609	1,167	2,170	1,380	1,568
Metropolitan and Circle—main	1,685	1,687	1,363	1,238	1,065	1,047
Northern	3,405	3,964	3,505	4,229	5,942	3,727
Piccadilly	2,113	2,376	2,228	3,115	3,886	2,934
Victoria	1,290	997	757	994	821	920
Total	16,126	15,102	14,874	17,801	20,116	16,216
Signal/Points						
Non LT	21	26	20	41	26	26
Bakerloo	343	263	264	292	249	355
Central	518	542	644	880	308	335
District	334	385	303	269	278	394
Jubilee and East LL	140	79	79	110	197	338
Metropolitan and Circle (c&h)	180	212	129	131	125	238
Metropolitan and Circle—main	247	256	209	266	194	290
Northern	245	324	298	323	216	317
Piccadilly	222	287	261	241	213	202
Victoria	99	120	115	166	149	131
Total	2,349	2,494	2,322	2,719	1,955	2,626
Other track						
Non LT	6	38	26	10	14	12
Bakerloo	53	99	193	201	176	168
Central	100	147	203	92	65	50
District	74	101	74	51	69	83
Jubilee and East LL	54	74	45	38	77	146
Metropolitan and Circle (c&h)	61	78	75	61	57	62
Metropolitan and Circle—main	88	118	105	73	83	82
Northern	95	123	141	165	109	105
Piccadilly	86	125	92	110	109	135
Victoria	42	56	54	80	66	66
Total	659	959	1,008	881	825	909

Since London Underground was reorganised in 1999, reporting of failures has changed slightly, so 2000–01 figures can be provided in only a slightly different format. Figures for 2000–01 are only available to the end of Quarter 3 (6 January 2001). London Underground inform me that the figures for Quarter 4 are currently being processed and will be available shortly.

2000–01—Quarters 1–3[1]

Line	*Trains*	*Signals/ Points*	*Other Track*
Bakerloo	690	189	111
Central	2,212	390	50
District	644	399	143
East London line	78	32	3
Jubilee	1,214	304	96
Circle and Hammersmith	1,182	303	61
Metropolitan	881	406	83
Northern	1,245	266	160
Piccadilly	1,957	256	108
Victoria	831	136	46
Waterloo and City[2]	12	13	5
Total	10,946	2,694	866

[1] 2000–01 figures only to end of Quarter 3 (6 January 2001).

[2] Waterloo and City line figures formerly recorded under Central line data.

These figures show a continuing reduction in the number of train failures. LUL explain that this is achieved through more reliable rolling stock on the Northern, Jubilee and Piccadilly lines.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the London Underground PPP to be implemented. [160730]

Mr. Prescott: I announced on 4 May that I had reached agreement with the Commissioner of Transport for London, Robert R. Kiley, on a way forward which will provide a secure basis for progressing the PPP. This should enable the PPP to be completed by the autumn, with the Underground transferring to the control of Transport for London once the first deep tube competition is concluded.

Mr. Kiley, who will remain Commissioner of Transport for London, will be appointed Chairman of London Transport. He will lead negotiations with the bidders aimed at finding a way to meet his concerns on unified management within the framework of the PPP and the current procurement. The way forward protects the key objectives of achieving safety and value for money. The details are set out in a Memorandum of Agreement, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Day-to-day management of the London Underground service will remain with Derek Smith, the Chairman and Managing Director of London Underground.

The current Chairman of London Transport, Sir Malcolm Bates, will step aside, but will remain a valued member of the London Transport Board. Sir Malcolm has played a crucial role in taking forward the PPP since he was appointed Chairman in February 1999, and I am grateful for his help in enabling these changes to take place.

I understand that Transport for London's application for judicial review will continue, as they believe that it involves an important point of legal principle which should be tested. Mr. Kiley has given an undertaking that he will play no role in the judicial review in his capacity as Chairman of London Transport.

Rail Incidents (Road Vehicles)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incidents of vehicles leaving the road and encroaching onto railway tracks were recorded *(a)* each week and *(b)* each month in the last year for which figures are available; what measures are in place to protect railway passengers and staff; and if he will request the Highways Agency to investigate such incidences and the efficacy of motorway barriers. [158831]

Mr. Hill: For the period 1 April 2000–31 March 2001, there were 15 incidents of road vehicles leaving the road and ending up on railway lines. Details of these incidents appear in the table.

Incidents of Motorists leaving the road and ending up on railway line

2000–01	*Number*
April	1
May	3
June	0
July	5
August	1
September	1
October	0
November	1
December	2
January	0
February	1
March	0

The figures are based on notifications forwarded by Railtrack to HSE's Railway Inspectorate. Data are not available on a weekly basis.

I announced on 12 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 466–67W, that following the accident at Selby, the Deputy Prime Minister had asked that two working groups be established. Alan Cooksey, the Deputy Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways (HSE), will chair the first group. Its remit is to prepare a report to the Health and Safety Commission on the risks arising to railway traffic from road traffic, in particular incidents where road vehicles have blocked railway lines, and recommend how those risks can best be controlled. The Chief Highway Engineer at the Highways Agency, John Kerman, will chair the second group. Its remit is to review the standards for provision of nearside safety barriers on major roads in the light of recent accidents and make recommendations to the Highways Agency. The reports of both these groups will be presented to the Deputy Prime Minster in the autumn.

Housing Costs

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 504W, on housing costs, how many of the responses *(a)* supporting the exclusion of some or all housing costs in the calculation of households' income, *(b)* supporting the inclusion of housing costs in the calculation of income, *(c)* which offered other suggestions and *(d)* making no comment were submitted on behalf of more than one organisation or individual; and if he will list the total number of organisations or individuals who expressed support for each of the four categories listed above. [159038]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* A total of 252 responses to the consultation document were received. The breakdown of responses is as shown:

(i) 50 responses supported the exclusion of some or all housing costs in the calculation of household income;

(ii) 86 responses supported the inclusion of housing costs in the calculation of household income;

(iii) 15 responses offered other suggestions;

(iv) 101 responses made no comment.

A copy of the full analysis of the consultation responses was placed in the Libraries of the House in November 1999.

Some organisations submitted an individual response as well as appending their names to a response from an umbrella organisation in the area. No separate record is available of how many were submitted on this basis.

The consultation draft of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy sets out the Government's approach of displaying the number of fuel poor according to the two main definitions:

on the basis of making no allowance for housing costs in the calculation of household income; and

by excluding any Housing Benefit or Income Support for Mortgage Interest (ISMI) payments.

This consultation provides a further opportunity to comment on this aspect of the fuel poverty definition.

Heavy Vehicles

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what studies have been undertaken by his Department into the driving of vehicles over 3.5 tonnes in weight by drivers under the age of 21 years; [159198]

(2) what studies have been undertaken by his Department regarding the risk of accidents involving drivers of vehicles in excess of 3.5 tonnes in weight without an HGV licence. [159199]

Mr. Prescott: None.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents have been recorded by his Department involving drivers of vehicles in excess of 3.5 tonnes in weight in each of the last 10 years. [159200]

Mr. Prescott: The table shows the number of road accidents in Great Britain resulting in personal injury, which involved goods vehicles with gross vehicle weight in excess of 3.5 tonnes between 1990 and 1999.

Number of accidents involving goods vehicles with gross vehicle weight over 3.5 tonnes: Great Britain: 1990–99

Year	Number
1990	15,063
1991	13,622
1992	13,020
1993	13,174
1994	13,184
1995	12,618
1996	12,433
1997	13,132
1998	13,278
1999	13,951

US Visit

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the purpose and itinerary of his recent visit to the USA was; which officials accompanied him; what the total cost to public funds was; which members of the United States Administration he met; and if he will make a statement. [159225]

Mr. Prescott *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* I visited the United States from 16 to 21 April.

On 17 April I held bilateral talks on transport issues in Washington with Norman Mineta, the United States Secretary of State of Transport; Jane Garvey, the Administrator at the Federal Aviation Administration, and Congressman James D. Oberstar.

In New York I attended the United Nations Commissions for Sustainable Development from 18 to 20 April, during which I had meetings with EU and other Ministers on climate change. I attended on 21 April high level consultations on climate change chaired by Jan Pronk, the Dutch Chairman of COP6, in which about 35 key countries participated.

I was accompanied by three officials from my Department and one Special Adviser. My costs for the visit were approximately £8,800. Total Government expenditure on Ministerial visits in 1999–2000, the latest year for which figures are available, was £4.6 million, compared to £7.9 million for the last year of the previous Administration.

Waste Management

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list by *(a)* location, *(b)* year, *(c)* tonnage, *(d)* source and *(e)* specific end-use the sites which used incinerator ash, waste lime or dust, for the purposes described in Waste Management Licensing Regulations Schedule 3, paragraph 7, referring to the spreading of waste for the benefit of land between 1990 and 2001; what the nature of the ash was; and if he will provide associated test results produced by his Department. [159488]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* Paragraph 7 of Schedule 3 to the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994 provides an exemption from waste management licensing for the spreading of certain types and quantities of waste where the activity results in benefit to agriculture or ecological improvement. The list of waste types subject to the exemption includes waste lime but does not include incinerator ash or dust.

The Environment Agency has a duty, under regulation 18 of the 1994 Regulations, to maintain a public register for each establishment or undertaking carrying on an exempt activity which shows:

The name and address of the establishment or undertaking;

The exempt activity; and

The place where the activity is carried on.

This information is available for inspection locally by members of the public, but detailed information of the kind requested by the hon. Member on the use of waste lime under the exemption is not held centrally by the Environment Agency. No associated test results have been produced by my Department on incinerator ash, waste lime or dust.

Energy Efficiency Savings

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 499W, if he will place in the Library information on improvements reported by each local authority in England on a population weighted basis. [160115]

Mr. Meacher: The information requested is not available. All details of energy efficiency improvements reported by energy conservation authorities were given in my written answers on 30 November 2000, *Official Report*, columns 757–58W, 26 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 731W, and 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 499W.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the overall figure is for savings on energy efficiency for England based on the returns reported by individual local authorities under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. [160116]

Mr. Meacher: Details of reported energy efficiency improvements in England, including an overall figure of just over 6 per cent. for the period 1 April 1996 to 31 March 2000, are included in four summary reports that were placed in the Libraries of the House following my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) on 26 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 731W.

GM Crops

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what date, and by whom, licences were issued for the *(a)* growing and *(b)* marketing of Chardon-LL or T25 maize. [159994]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* T25 is the name of a type of genetically modified (GM) maize developed by Aventis. The modification, transformation event 25 (T25) confers resistance to a particular herbicide, in this particular case, Glufosinate Ammonium. Chardon LL is a variety of T25 maize.

Directive 90–220, on the deliberate release of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), recognises two types of release. First, those for research purposes (known as Part B releases) and, second, those for marketing (known as Part C releases). Applications for Part B releases are assessed on an individual basis at Member State level and approved by the competent authorities in that state.

Applications for approval of GMOs for marketing (Part C approvals) are made initially to one of the 15 Member States. The competent authority in this Member State reviews the application and forms an opinion. If favourable, the opinion and application dossier (which includes the risk assessment for the GMO) are passed to the European Commission and the 14 other Member States. Each Member State then examines the application in detail. If there are no objections to the favourable opinion, formal Part C approval is granted by the Member State in which the application was first made, on behalf of the whole European Union (EU). Once granted the Part C consent is valid across the EU.

The French competent authority received the initial application for Part C approval of T25 maize in 1995, which was for both commercial cultivation and for importation. Following consideration by other Member States, the French granted formal approval for T25 maize on 3 August 1998. A number of Member States have also given approval to the cultivation of T25 maize for research (Part B releases). The Statement of the French Competent Authority for T25 maize shows that various Part B approvals were given by the French, Italian, German and United Kingdom competent authorities between 1992 and 1997. I have placed a copy of the statement in the library of the house. This contains the exact details of each release.

Any crop, irrespective of it being GM or not, also requires approval under the National Seed Listing legislation. Varieties may not be marketed until they have been added to the UK National List or EU Common Catalogue. A proposal to add Chardon LL to the UK National List was published in March 2000. A number of affected persons made written representations or asked to make oral representations. A Hearing began on 2 October and was adjourned on 15 November until further notice pending resolution of concerns about the system used in France. Meanwhile, I understand that MAFF has sought the views of the European Commission on the legal status of the French authority's testing procedures. Chardon LL will only be added to the UK National List if all the legal requirements have been met in full.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what date the original safety assessments were undertaken on Chardon-LL and T25 maize made by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment; and what other bodies were responsible for undertaking such safety assessments. [159995]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* Chardon LL is a variety of T25 maize. The original safety assessments for marketing approval of T25 maize under Directive 90/220 were made by the French Authorities (refer to PQ 159994 above) in 1995. The application dossier was then referred to the UK and the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) considered this on 20 June 1996. English Nature, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Health and Safety Executive and the then Department of the Environment also undertook safety assessments. ACRE was satisfied that the T25 did not pose a risk to human health and the environment. This included consideration of animal feed safety in association with MAFF. The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes also considered the safety of T25 and advised that the product was safe for use in food.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has held with the East Midlands regional development agency regarding reductions in single regeneration budget funding granted in the current year; for what reason and on what basis SRB grants awarded in Northamptonshire have been scaled back in the current year; and which SRB projects are subject to savings clawbacks in the current year. [160104]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* There have been no reductions in the East Midlands Development Agency's SRB allocation for 2001–02. The SRB allocation for the East Midlands Development Agency has been increased to £38.398 million in 2001–02 from £37.700 million in 2000–01. The RDAs have the responsibility to manage their programmes within their allocations, and negotiate individual SRB schemes on an annual basis.

We regularly meet RDA chairs collectively and have discussed finance issues, including SRB funding, on several occasions.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the review by Oscar Faber of predicted traffic flows after the opening of the Birmingham northern relief road on the M6 and other roads. [160127]

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend's question relates to an operational matter. I have accordingly asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to him.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Tony Wright, dated 8 May 2001:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Keith Hill, has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking if the review by Oscar Faber of predicted traffic flows after the opening of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road on the M6 and other roads will be published.

First of all I should make it clear that, under an agreement with the Secretary of State for Transport, certain responsibilities for the Birmingham Northern Relief Road rests with Midland Expressway

Limited, including production of traffic predictions for the new road and the M6 corridor, which are presented at the Public Inquiry into the scheme between June 1994 and October 1995. Little, if anything of substance, has changed since the evidence was presented—although comment in recent press notices might have suggested otherwise.

The Highways Agency has a wider remit to manage the motorway and trunk road network and, as part of that responsibility, must ensure that information about demands and pressures on the network are continuously updated. In their capacity as advisers to the Highways Agency in the Midlands on development matters, Oscar Faber have been commissioned to carry out some work to assist in the consideration and assessment of development. As such, it is not a general review and is not embodied in a single report.

Oscar Faber have undertaken other work which considers the existing and predicted 'Stress on the Network'. This has been formally reported and deposited as input to Regional Planning Guidance.

You are welcome to have sight of all the above Oscar Faber material, which can be viewed at the Agency's Birmingham office at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham B15 1BL. If you would like to take advantage of this opportunity please contact Gwyn Drake, Divisional Director for Network and Customer Services, who will be happy to make the necessary arrangements. Gwyn can be contacted at the Birmingham office or by telephoning 0121 678 8014.

Home Energy Saving Scheme

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many applications have been made under the new home energy saving scheme; how many have been accepted; how many have been completed; and what the average wait is between application and completion of the work. [160264]

Mr. Meacher: The information requested is set out in the table. While the average wait is calculated as being 108 days, since the scheme started on 1 June 2000, there have been instances when householders have had to wait much longer, especially for heating measures. We are working with the Home Energy Efficiency scheme managers to reduce the time taken to install measures. Since January the average waiting time has been reduced to 59 days.

	Number
Applications submitted to date	323,244
Applications accepted	263,359
Households where work has been completed	111,985
Average time taken between application and date of work (days)[1]	[2]108

[1] Measured from date of call with respect to telephone applications; from date of receipt in the case of postal applications; or from date of e-mail.

[2] This is the average since the start of the scheme on 1 June 2000. Since 1 January the average time taken to completion of works has fallen to 59 days.

Regeneration (Walsall)

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding allocation has been made to Walsall for the purpose of regeneration since 1997; if he will list the schemes and organisations in receipt of funding and the amounts involved; and what component of these awards is made with security, community safety and crime reduction as an objective. [160276]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The information is as follows:

New Deal for Community Funding

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions announced Round 2 New Deal for Community Funding of £263.5 million for five West Midlands neighbourhoods on 30 April, £52 million has been offered to the New Horizons Partnership in Walsall which covers the Blakenall, Bloxwich East and Leamore neighbourhood. Over 16 per cent. of this funding, £8.5 million over 10 years, will be targeted on community safety and crime reduction measures.

Neighbourhood Renewal Funding

Walsall has also been awarded £16 million Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) over three years. The Local Strategic Partnership in Walsall will determine the use of NRF moneys to help with the most pressing needs in the area's deprived neighbourhoods.

Single Regeneration Budget

Walsall borough has been awarded over £34 million SRB funding since the beginning of the SRB Programme. This funding is through three SRB schemes;

Empowering Local Communities—Walsall (£14.6 million)

A seven year scheme targeting the four most deprived areas of the borough, led by the local authority. The other key partners are the TEC, Chamber of Commerce, voluntary sector, Police and Probation Service. Over 9,000 local people will benefit from community safety initiatives.

Raising Standards in Education, Learning And Employability Walsall (£6.4 million)

This seven year scheme aims to improve standards in education, skills and learning. Initiatives include drugs prevention through peer pressure, community safety strategy, health, housing development links to job opportunities.

Building on Diversity Walsall (£13.8 million)

Targeted on five of Walsall's most deprived wards, projects will address health inequalities; improve community safety and environment and tackle social exclusion.

Land and Property Projects

Site Investigation And Environmental Improvement Schemes.

A total of £4.4 million has been spent in Walsall since 1997 on 23 projects, including James Adams limestone mine and Walsall Civic Square.

Building Construction/Redevelopments

A total of £700,000 has been spent on five projects in Walsall, including residential redevelopment of the former Moxley Hospital Site; construction of community facilities at the Camden Centre, Small street and Willenhall.

Roadworks

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* the Highways Agency are exempt from section 74 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. [160390]

Mr. Hill: The powers under section 74 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, introduced by the previous Government, provided for regulations to be made allowing charges to be levied on utility companies whose works exceed an agreed deadline. However, the Act did not extend this power to works carried out by highway authorities.

This Government are determined to reduce the disruption which all works, whether carried out by utility or highway authority, cause to road users. The powers under section 74 have been activated with effect from 1 April this year. At the same time a revised code of practice for the co-ordination of works and best practice guidelines were published, which apply not only to works on behalf of utilities but also to works for local highway authorities and the Highways Agency. We are also considering whether further measures may be required.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his estimate is of the proportion of roadworks carried out by *(a)* utilities, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* the Highways Agency. [160389]

Mr. Hill: Works carried out to the highway include "road" works—carried out by or on behalf of highway authorities—and "street" works—involving statutory utilities. Detailed figures are not available on the proportion of overall works carried out by utilities, local authorities and the Highways Agency. However, the Government have recently commissioned Halcrow UK to undertake a study of the extent of utility street works across England. As part of that work, they will also be looking at works carried out by highway authorities. We expect to make the conclusions of Halcrow's research available to the House.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his assessment is of the impact on prices paid by consumers for utility services arising from the lane rental provisions of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. [160391]

Mr. Hill: The Government took powers in the Transport Act 2000 to make regulations permitting highway authorities to levy daily charges on utilities from the outset of works (so-called "lane rental"). These powers are being kept in reserve at this stage as regards national implementation. However, we have agreed that the London borough of Camden and Middlesbrough borough council may operate pilot schemes for lane rental in their area, starting later this year.

The impact of any national lane rental scheme on utility companies and their customers and the extent to which road users will benefit from reduced disruption will obviously depend upon detailed arrangements, for instance the level at which rental charges were set and the type of works which would attract charges. Should we decide to launch the powers nationally, we will want to look very closely at the effects of the pilot schemes in devising the details of the scheme and in carrying out a regulatory impact assessment.

Buses

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to regulate the size of buses. [160142]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The size of buses is currently regulated by the Road Vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations which in turn incorporate dimensions that have to be accepted by all European Union countries through Directive 96/53/EC. Amendments to this Directive to allow longer buses are currently under discussion. In my response of 10 April to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), *Official Report,* columns 497–99W, I explained that the Council had reached a general political agreement on allowing the use of buses up to 15 metres long. But owing to UK concerns over the manoeuvrability of these vehicles the text for a derogation for us would be remitted to COREPER for further consideration. It is unlikely that a final agreement will be reached before the end of this year.

Construction Industry

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many construction industry inspector posts are vacant in each region of the United Kingdom. [160278]

Mr. Meacher: In April 2001, the number of vacant construction industry inspector posts in each Division of the Health and Safety Executive's Field Operations Directorate, were as follows:

Division	*Number of vacancies*
Scotland	0
Yorkshire and North East	0
North West	0
Midlands	0
Wales and West	0
London and South East	8
Home Counties	0
Total	8

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action the Government are taking to recruit suitable people to fill vacancies for construction industry inspectors in London and the South East. [160277]

Mr. Meacher: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) usually fills construction industry inspector posts internally from its pool of experienced general inspectors of health and safety. HSE is currently running a major campaign to recruit trainee inspectors nationally, the majority to fill the vacancies in the Field Operations Directorate, and this includes those in its London and the South East Division. In order to help address the resource shortfall more quickly, HSE is also seeking to deploy inspectors from other divisions into London for limited periods and is exploring the contribution that could be made by additional specialist inspectors supporting operational construction inspection.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those shire counties which have had no reported cases of foot and mouth disease and which have opened *(a)* less than 25 per cent. of the total length of their rights of way and *(b)* 50 per cent. or more of the total length of their rights of way; and if he will make a statement. [160729]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The county councils which have had no reported cases of foot and mouth disease and which have opened less than 25 per cent. of the total length of their rights of way are: Lincolnshire (0 per cent.), Buckinghamshire (5 per cent.), Hampshire (5 per cent.), West Sussex (10 per cent.), Bedfordshire (12 per cent.), East Sussex (12 per cent.), Nottinghamshire (15 per cent.), and Dorset (22 per cent.).

The county councils which have had no reported cases of foot and mouth disease and which have opened 50 per cent. or more of the total length of their rights of way are: Norfolk (59 per cent.), Surrey (70 per cent.), Suffolk (75 per cent.), and Cambridgeshire (85 per cent.).

These figures show that many local authorities continue to keep rights of way closed unnecessarily. The Government's veterinary and scientific advisers have confirmed that outside Infected Areas there is no justification for keeping so many paths closed. Councils that ignore this advice are failing in their duty to their residents, their visitors, and their local businesses to open rights of way wherever it is safe to do so.

Several authorities lag so far behind public opinion and professional advice that they continue to keep closed even paths across woodland and arable land. This cannot be justified. Local authorities quite rightly wish to take account of the views of farmers and land managers, but they need to balance these with the views of the many other businesses in their communities whose livelihood is threatened, as well as the interests of their residents and visitors. Unnecessary closures mean unnecessary inconvenience, unnecessary economic damage, and in some cases unnecessary danger where people are forced on to busy roads because paths are closed.

In authorities which have taken a more balanced judgment of needs, such as Surrey, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, well over half the path networks have been reopened. There is no reason why the worst performing authorities should not achieve a similar or better performance. I urge all councils, and especially those without infected areas, to make significant progress towards reopening their rights of way wherever it is safe to do so.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the cost to councils of awarding hardship relief to assist businesses affected by the outbreak of foot and mouth; and if he will provide additional assistance to smaller district councils to help meet this cost. [160266]

Mr. Meacher: To date no formal assessment of the costs borne by local authorities in implementing the hardship rate relief scheme has been undertaken. However, we have extended the central Government contribution to the cost of the relief from 75 per cent. to 95 per cent. in cases where the business is located in one of the 151 eligible rural districts and has a rateable value of £12,000 or less.

A number of small rural district councils have made representations that it will be difficult for them to find the 5 per cent. of the cost that the scheme requires. I am looking into that, though it is important that local authorities do retain ownership of the scheme if distribution of relief is to be undertaken rigorously.

Waste Packaging Regulations

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the new user's guide to the Producer Responsibility Obligation (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 will be published. [160636]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: We have almost completed the revised edition and hope to publish it shortly.

Sellafield

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what time scale he has established for the preparation and completion of the report of the consultant appointed to advise Ministers on the application for the Sellafield MOX Plant Authorisation; and if he will place a copy of the consultant's report in the Library. [159778]

Mr. Meacher: I announced on 23 April that the Department had appointed Arthur D. Little Ltd. as independent consultants to evaluate BNFL's economic case for operating the Sellafield MOX plant, and that they would report in around seven weeks from that date. A copy of their report will be offered to the Library, excluding only any commercially sensitive information whose publication we judge could cause significant damage to commercial interests.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to assist the preparations for the Rio+10 conference; what contributions he intends to make at the conference; and if he will make a statement. [159779]

Mr. Meacher: The United Kingdom has been one of the first countries to offer concrete support to South Africa to assist in the preparations for Rio+10—now known as the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). This will take place in Johannesburg in September 2002. In his speech at Chatham House on 6 March the Prime Minister reiterated his intention to attend the Summit, the first Head of Government to make such a commitment. The Department for International Development will provide £1.5 million in support of the Summit, most of which will be used to assist the Government of South Africa in their preparations. The Government are also seconding experienced officials to South Africa and to the UN secretariat to strengthen their teams. The Deputy Prime Minister discussed these matters with the South African Environment Minister Mohammed Valli Moosa on 20 April in New York, during the Ninth Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.

The Government, and the devolved Administrations, are or will be supporting a number of preparatory meetings in the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister has put strong emphasis on the involvement of civil society, especially business and NGOs, in all aspects of the Summit. The agenda for the Summit has yet to be agreed. It will be prepared through regional prepcom meetings in the UN later this year, including a UN Economic

Commission for Europe meeting in Geneva on 24–25 September. The Government are working closely with European partners to prepare an EU interim position, and supports the proposals set out in the Commission's Communication of 6 February. As the agenda is developed we shall formulate our views on how best to contribute to the conference itself.

FV Gaul

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide a breakdown of the costs incurred to date in connection with the loss of the FV Gaul. [160731]

Mr. Prescott: The costs incurred to date in connection with the loss of the FV Gaul amount to about £1 million.

The original formal investigation held in 1974 cost £20,000 and the research conducted last year by Mr. Roger Clarke, acting as a consultant for the Department, which included the search for bodies of the crew in Northern Russia, cost £50,000. The total spent on the Marine Accident Investigation Branch's survey of the wreck conducted in 1998 cost nearly £700,000.

The discovery of new and important evidence by the MAIB led to the formal investigation being reopened on 16 April 1999. Since then over £300,000 has been paid to the firm of solicitors representing the families of the crew, the Max Gold Partnership, of which nearly £240,000 has been paid as legal fees. The families of the skipper and mate are separately represented by Birnberg Pierce & Partners and a bill for £85,000 has recently been submitted to the Department of which some £57,000 is for legal fees.

Farm Vehicles (Traffic Calming)

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will require the Transport Research Laboratory to conduct research into the effect of traffic calming measures on *(a)* tractors and *(b)* other farming vehicles and direct local authorities to put schemes affecting roads used by tractors on hold; and if he will update traffic advisory leaflet 7/96 to compel local authorities to consult agricultural interests. [160496]

Mr. Hill: I have no proposals at present to carry out research into the effects of traffic calming measures on agricultural machinery using public roads. The Highways (Road Humps) Regulations 1999 require local highway authorities to consult with organisations or persons using the highway to which a road hump proposal relates. The Highways (Traffic Calming) Regulations 1999 require the local highway authority to consult, as the highway authority thinks fit, with persons or organisations who use the highway or are likely to be affected by the traffic calming works. My Department has, in relevant Traffic Advisory Leaflets published since 1999, included a reminder of the need to consult with users of agricultural equipment.

Yellow School Bus Pilots

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those organisations that have applied to set up a yellow school bus pilot scheme; and when he expects each pilot scheme to start. [160295]

Mr. Hill: We understand that FirstGroup plc is in discussion with a number of local authorities and other organisations about setting up yellow school bus pilot schemes. It will be for FirstGroup and individual local authorities and organisations to decide when each pilot scheme should start.

Regional Development Agencies

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people are employed *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time in each regional development agency. [160296]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The most recent figures for staff employed in each Regional Development Agency are as follows:

Name of Agency	*Full-time staff*	*Part-time staff*
One North East	215	8
North West Development Agency	209	9
Yorkshire Forward	194	21
East Midlands Development Agency	127	8
Advantage West Midlands	162	1
East of England Development Agency	89	1
South East England Development Agency	121	6
South West Regional Development Agency	185	11

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the annual *(a)* running cost and *(b)* forecast running cost is for each regional development agency. [160298]

Ms Armstrong: The Regional Development Agencies' running cost budgets for 2001–02 were announced in my answer to my hon. Friend, the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) on 9 March 2001, *Official Report,* columns 366–67W. My answer included a table setting out the total budget for 2001–02, of which the following is an extract:

£000

Programme	*Administration*
One North East	10,103
North West DA	14,044
Yorkshire Forward	9,989
East Midlands DA	7,488
Advantage West Midlands	8,793
East of England DA	5,836
South East of England DA	6,643
South West RDA	9,099
London DA	9,470
Total	81,465

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to carry out a new study to update the Aircraft Noise Index Study of 1985. [160726]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: My Department is to carry out a major study to reassess attitudes to aircraft noise. This new study underlines the Government's commitment to underpin our policy on aircraft noise by substantial research that commands the widest possible confidence.

Our current understanding of the relationship between annoyance and aircraft noise over 24 hours is based primarily on research that was carried out in the 1980s, in particular the Aircraft Noise Index Study published in 1985. That was based on the largest survey yet carried out of public attitudes to aircraft noise and eventually led the Government of the day to adopt the Leq (equivalent continuous noise) index for daytime noise contours.

The conclusions have been broadly confirmed by other studies here and abroad, and we have no reason to doubt their validity. But in the light of our commitment to develop a new air transport policy, of changes to traffic patterns since then, and the general reduction in noise levels of individual aircraft, it is now timely to commission a fresh study.

We want the aviation industry to meet the external costs it imposes. This new study will give us more information on the value people give to relief from noise, and to focus our policies from a broader range of evidence.

In deciding to commission this further research, I have considered the findings of three recent Government-sponsored studies on sleep disturbance, and the advice of independent experts. I am grateful to those who sat on the steering and technical working groups for their help in shaping those studies. I have concluded that a new full-scale objective sleep study would be unlikely to add significantly to our understanding; and that the way forward is through concentrating instead on further research into subjective responses to annoyance by night and by day.

I am placing copies of the three reports (Adverse Effects of Night-Time Aircraft Noise, Aircraft Noise and Sleep-UK Trial Methodology Study, and Perceptions of Aircraft Noise Sleep and Health) in the House Library. These have been published by the former Department of Operational Research and Analysis (DORA) of National Air Traffic Services Ltd., and by the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research Consultancy Services and Department of Social Statistics at the University of Southampton, respectively. Further information on Government sponsored research into aircraft noise and sleep will shortly be available on the Aviation section of my Department's website.

Invitations to tender for the new study will be issued shortly. We shall ensure that both environmental and aviation interests can contribute to the oversight of the project. It will last three years, with pilot results planned to be available next year to feed into our White Paper on air transport.

Flood Drainage

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has made to Ofwat on the responsibility of the water industry for funding drainage improvements following the recent floods. [160247]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The responsibilities of the sewerage undertaker are prescribed in the Water Industry Act 1991. At the periodic review the Director General of Water Services, sets companies' price limits and within this framework it is for each sewerage undertaker to determine its priorities. Ofwat and my officials are currently discussing the causes of sewer flooding and possible remedies.

Rail Franchises (Wales)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in restructuring the railway franchise system in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [160613]

Mr. Hill: Arriva plc in conjunction with Connex Transport UK Ltd., FirstGroup plc, National Express Group plc and Serco Rail have been shortlisted by the Strategic Rail Authority to prepare Best and Final Offers for the new Wales and the Borders franchise. The Authority has announced the conclusion of negotiations to restructure and reorganise some of the existing franchises which will be affected. Further announcements will be made in due course.

Highways (Flood Damage)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to give local authorities assistance to help them with the damage to highways caused by the recent floods. [160721]

Mr. Hill: We have decided to give extra assistance this year to those English authorities where the cost of dealing with flood damage to their highways would absorb a high proportion of their available resources for highway maintenance. Officials are writing to authorities seeking up to date information on the cost of flood damage before the final level of support is determined, but on the basis of the information we have received to date it is likely that the total payments nationally will be in the region of £12 million.

Marine Environment

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he proposes to meet the Government's aims of achieving sustainable development and maintaining biodiversity in the marine environment. [160727]

Mr. Meacher: My Department is leading a review of marine nature conservation looking specifically at how to address this matter. The interim report of the review, which has recently been presented to Ministers, sets out a number of recommendations aimed at meeting these aims. I have today agreed to the publication of the interim report on my Department's website and placed copies in the Libraries of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Plastic Baton Round (Alternative)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to consult victims' organisations over the acceptability of alternatives to the plastic baton round. [158792]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has made clear that he would welcome representations from any group or organisation on this issue. Naturally, when it is appropriate to do so, we will consult widely on the question of acceptability.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means he advertised for the post of project manager for the Project Board of the Steering Group set up to examine alternatives to the plastic baton round; and what the *(a)* job description, *(b)* personal specification for the appointment and *(c)* remuneration for the post is. [158791]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has approved the appointment of Deputy Assistant Commissioner Michael Messinger as programme co-ordinator, on a part-time basis. The position was not advertised. I will publish a copy of the terms of reference for the post when they have been finalised.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has participated in with the objective of incorporating an independent element in his research into a less potentially lethal alternative to the plastic baton round and commissioning a social impact assessment of alternatives to the plastic baton round. [158790]

Mr. Ingram: In line with the Patten Commission report, full account will be taken of public acceptability and all other relevant issues in our continuing efforts to identify alternatives to the baton round. The project board established to lead the research project will continue to consult widely and I will be meeting various interest groups concerned with this issue over the coming months.

RUC (Recruitment)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list, in respect of each of the recruitment competitions to the RUC from 1995 to date the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of (i) applicants and (ii) candidates offered appointment, broken down by perceived community background, who took up appointments in the (1) RUC and (2) full-time RUC Reserve. [157607]

Mr. Ingram: The tables show the breakdown of applications for recruitment to the Royal Ulster Constabulary from 1995 to the last recruitment campaign in December 1998 and the corresponding number of successful applicants in percentage terms.

Applications/acceptances to RUC from 1995–98 by gender and community background

Regulars—Applications

	CB1			*CB2*			*CB3*			
	M	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*	*Total*
Comp C 1995	838	611	1,449	296	171	467	113	29	142	2,058
Comp D 1995	1,113	661	1,774	269	169	438	158	30	188	2,400
Comp E 1996	983	588	1,571	236	133	369	129	26	155	2,095
Comp F 1996	1,312	741	2,054	261	145	406	242	27	269	2,729
Comp G 1997	1,368	804	2,172	253	159	412	188	25	213	2,797
Comp H 1998	1,332	802	2,134	270	161	431	228	32	260	2,825
Comp I 1998	1,414	898	2,312	470	280	750	246	51	297	3,359

Regulars—Acceptances

	CB1			*CB2*			*CB3*				
	M	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*	*Total*	*Percentage of total applications*
Comp C 1995	84	14	98	18	2	20	8	1	9	127	6.2
Comp D 1995	124	14	138	20	4	24	15	0	15	177	7.4
Comp E 1996	103	22	125	10	3	13	5	0	5	143	6.8
Comp F 1996	75	19	94	13	1	14	14	0	14	122	4.5
Comp G 1997	79	17	96	13	2	15	9	0	9	120	4.3
Comp H 1998	80	45	125	9	3	12	7	0	7	144	5.1
Comp I 1998	72	38	110	9	9	18	4	1	5	133	4.0

Full-time reserves—Applications

	CB1			*CB2*			*CB3*			
	M	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*	*Total*
Comp B 1995	635	407	1,042	167	115	282	105	25	130	1,454
Comp C 1996	654	421	1,075	154	101	255	90	11	101	1,431
Comp D 1997	753	402	1,155	109	75	184	113	22	135	1,474
Comp E 1997	376	236	612	60	46	106	43	12	55	773
Comp F 1997	709	423	1,132	119	78	197	104	24	128	1,457

Full-time—Acceptances

	CB1			*CB2*			*CB3*				*Percentage of total*
	M	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*	*M*	*F*	*T*	*Total*	*applications*
Comp B 1996	12	7	19	4	0	4	2	1	3	26	1.8
Comp C 1996	66	63	129	14	10	24	7	1	8	161	11.3
Comp D 1997	19	5	24	0	0	0	3	2	5	29	2.0
Comp E 1997	25	4	29	2	1	3	3	0	3	35	4.5
Comp F 1997	31	19	50	3	2	5	3	0	3	58	4.0

Notes:

CB1—Perceived Protestant
CB2—Perceived Roman Catholic
CB3—Others/Undetermined

Oversight Commissioner

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library a copy of the programme of actions for the Commissioner appointed under section 67 of the Police Northern Ireland Act 2000 and his timetable for completing his task. [159472]

Mr. Ingram: The Oversight Commissioner's first report, which was placed in the Library of the House on 10 January 2001, laid out the Commissioner's programme of action.

Terrorist Offences

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the *(a)* Provisional IRA, *(b)* Real IRA, *(c)* Continuity IRA, *(d)* INLA, *(e)* UDA/UFF, *(f)* LVF, *(g)* Orange Volunteer Force and *(h)* Red Hand Defenders have been *(i)* charged with a terrorist-related offence and (ii) convicted of a terrorist-related offence in relation to crimes committed after 10 April 1998. [155469]

Mr. Ingram: The table details the number of persons charged with "terrorist-type" or serious public order offences since 10 April 1998. The following points should be noted about this information:

(a) Where a person has been charged with a number of different offences only the most serious is shown. It is not possible to attribute responsibility to specific groups as to do so would incur a disproportionate cost.

(b) Charges brought during this period may relate to offences committed prior to 10 April 1998.

(c) The "other" category includes a range of public order offences including, for example, riotous behaviour, possession or throwing of petrol bombs, assaulting police, hijacking and obstructing the highway. The offences of membership and withholding information are also included.

I regret that information concerning convictions is not available. The processing of court statistics on the court proceedings database was suspended in April 1998. Court data are therefore not available for 1998, 1999 and 2000. I understand that work to capture this missing data is at an advanced stage, but will be some time before this missing dat is at an advanced stage, but will be some time before this information becomes available.

Persons charged with terrorist-type and serious public order offences

	Loyalist	*Republican*
10 April 1998–31 March 1999		
Murder	4	1
Attempted Murder	4	3
Firearms	34	19
Explosives	10	3
Armed Robbery	17	10
Other	263	67
Total	332	103
1 April 1999–31 March 2000		
Murder	4	1
Attempted Murder	6	0
Firearms	43	23
Explosives	9	7
Armed Robbery	7	14
Other	106	68
Total	175	113
1 April 2000–21 March 2001		
Murder	5	1
Attempted Murder	13	2
Firearms	29	12
Explosives	2	9
Armed Robbery	8	7
Other	142	34
Total	199	65

Public Order (Lurgan)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals were charged with public order offences arising from events in and around Lurgan on *(a)* 10 July, *(b)* 11 July, *(c)* 12 July, *(d)* 13 July, *(e)* 14 July and *(f)* 15 July 2000; what the result of those prosecutions was; and what the breakdown by perceived community origin of those charged and convicted is. [158737]

Mr. Ingram: Charges relating to public order offences in Lurgan sub-division during July 2000 are set out in the table.

Charges relating to public order offences in Lurgan sub-division during July 2000

Date	*Number charged*	*Convicted*	*Pending*	*Withdrawn*
Loyalist				
10 July	1	—	—	1
11 July	6	[1]3	[2]2	1
12 July	1	—	—	1

Charges relating to public order offences in Lurgan sub-division during July 2000

Date	*Number charged*	*Convicted*	*Pending*	*Withdrawn*
13 July	—	—	—	—
14 July	—	—	—	—
15 July	—	—	—	—
Republican				
10 July	—	—	—	—
11 July	—	—	—	—
12 July	—	—	[3]3	—
13 July	—	—	—	—
14 July	—	—	—	—
15 July	—	—	—	—

[1] 3 × Convictions:

(a) Sentenced in absence and bench warrant issued.

(b) Adjourned for pre-sentence reports.

(c) Convicted of riotous behaviour—fined £250; Convicted of resisting police—fined £100.

[2] Awaiting trial.

[3] Cases with Director of Public Prosecutions awaiting direction.

Police Ombudsman

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints have been received by the office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in each month from his appointment up to the latest available date; how many in each month were *(a)* rejected, *(b)* withdrawn, *(c)* under investigation, *(d)* had investigations completed, *(e)* resulted in disciplinary proceedings being taken, and by whom and *(f)* resulted in files being sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions. [159156]

Mr. Ingram: The make up and disposition of the complaints received by the Police Ombudsman from 6 November 2000 to 21 April 2001 are not available in the exact form requested. However, the figures that are available are listed in tabular form in the two charts.

Table 1: Cases and complaints received by the Police Ombudsman

Number

Month received	*Cases*[1]	*Complaints*
November 2000	400	518
December 2000	265	362
January 2001	332	449
February 2001	283	360
March 2001	243	294
April 2001	220	252

[1] Cases may involve more than one complaint

Table 2: Current status of cases received by the Police Ombudsman

Month received	*Case closed*[1]	*Withdrawn*	*Resolved*	*Awaiting resolution*	*Other status*	*Under investigation*	*Total*
November 2000	174	25	16	23	12	150	400
December 2000	120	14	15	19	17	80	265
January 2001	117	18	13	39	5	134	332
February 2001	67	16	1	28	35	136	283
March 2001	22	8	0	58	46	109	243
April 2001	3	2	0	9	121	85	220

[1] For various reasons

Procedures for discipline and the sending of files to the Director of Public Prosecutions are currently being developed. Consequently, as at 21 April, no cases have resulted in disciplinary proceedings and no cases have resulted in files being sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

However, the Police Ombudsman assumed responsibility for 2,396 cases under transitional arrangements from the Independent Commission for Police Complaints. Of these, five cases have resulted in disciplinary proceedings being taken and a total of 250 cases have been referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

PRIME MINISTER

Global Health

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister when the Performance and Innovation Unit's report on global health will be published. [160722]

The Prime Minister: The PIU report "Tackling the Diseases of Poverty: A package to meet the Okinawa/Millennium Targets for HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria" is published today. The report sets out a range of options for tackling these three devastating diseases in developing countries as a contribution, both to the UK Government's thinking and to the international debate.

The report calls for a comprehensive global strategy to: improve and expand coverage of health systems and health promotion; make affordable for those that need them vaccines, drugs, and other products to prevent and treat the diseases; and provide incentives for research into new, more effective health products.

The PIU report proposes a series of measures including: a new Global Fund for Health to finance the purchase of existing health products to tackle the three diseases, substantially scaling up the provision of these products to those most in need but least able to afford them; binding advance purchase commitment to purchase new, more effective products as they become available, strengthening incentives to step up investment in R&D; a framework for tiered pricing and greater local production of patented products under voluntary licences to improve affordability; and clarification of the flexibilities in intellectual property protection under the WTO TRIPS agreement; targeted support including tax credits and public-private partnerships for R&D, and a new platform for clinical trials of new drugs and vaccines; and a scaled-up and better co-ordinated global partnership to halt and reverse the spread of disease.

The report estimates that 50 million lives could be saved over the next 20 years if the global effort to tackle these diseases was better resourced and co-ordinated.

The UK is already fully committed to playing its part in a greater and better co-ordinated international effort to tackle communicable diseases in the developing world. The ideas in the PIU report will help the UK pursue this agenda internationally at the highest level.

Copies have been placed in the House Library.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the Football Association for Government funding for the redevelopment of Wembley Stadium. [160274]

The Prime Minister: The Football Association informed the Government that it was unable to secure the necessary private-sector investment to proceed with the Wembley project, and sought discussions on future options. This work is now under way.

Entertainment Budgets

Mr. Evans: To ask the Prime Minister what the entertainment budget was for Number 10 Downing street in each of the years from 1997 to date. [160097]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) on 17 January 2000, *Official Report,* column 268W.

The total cost to my office of official entertainment at 10 Downing street and Chequers was:

	£
Year	*Cost*
1999–2000	60,652
2000–01[1]	72,790

[1] This figure is given on a cash accounting basis

Costs vary depending on the nature of events as they did under previous Administrations.

The programme of events at No. 10 is designed to give access to as many people as possible and includes regular children's tea parties and receptions for a wide cross section of the community. In the past year these have included events for teachers, doctors, members of the emergency services and victims of the floods.

Over the past year, to discuss developments in the business world, I have hosted more working breakfasts than in the previous year. I also jointly hosted a reception for 800 people to mark the outstanding performance of British athletes at the 2000 Olympics.

Ministerial Correspondence

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister how he applied the rules governing disclosure of ministerial correspondence to requests for disclosure of the letter he received from the Countess of Wessex. [160639]

The Prime Minister: Under section 3 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it is not our practice to comment on whether there has been or has not been correspondence between the Royal Household and Ministers.

Correspondence

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Prime Minister when he will reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire of 22 March. [160335]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the President of the Council replied on my behalf on 4 May.

Missile Defence

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions he has been contacted by President Bush on missile defence systems; and what response he gave. [160536]

The Prime Minister: I am in regular contact with President Bush on a range of issues including policy on missile defence. We have not discussed specific systems.

TREASURY

Cancer Survival Rates

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the proportion of patients who, having been diagnosed with *(a)* lung cancer, *(b)* bowel cancer, *(c)* breast cancer, *(d)* cervical cancer and *(e)* prostate cancer survive for five years; and what the comparable figures are for (i) France, (ii) Germany, (iii) Sweden and (iv) the USA. [160240]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Quentin Davies, dated 8 May 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the five year survival rates are for (a) lung, (b) bowel, (c) breast, (d) cervical, and (d) prostate cancer, and what the comparable figures are for (i) France, (ii) Germany, (iii) Sweden, and (iv) the USA. (160240)

The latest available five-year survival rates for England are for cases diagnosed in the three year period 1992–94 and followed up to 31st December 1999. Data for eight common cancers including (a) lung, (b) colon, (c) female breast, (d) cervical, and (e) prostate cancer are available on the National Statistics website, www.statistics.co.uk, under "Health and Care". (Figures for (a) and (b) are presented for males and females separately).

Survival from cancers of the colon and rectum, which together form the large bowel, are similar. Hence figures for colon alone are included in the presentation of survival in eight common cancers on the National Statistics website for patients diagnosed in 1992–94. Survival from cancer of the rectum for patients diagnosed in 1991–93 in England and Wales was published in the summer 2000 edition of Health Statistics Quarterly (number 6).

Five-year survival data for the USA can also be found on the National Statistics website, at the address shown above, for patients diagnosed during 1986–90 and followed up to 31st December 1995 for equivalent sites.

Comparable data for France, Germany and Sweden are published in Berrino F, Sant M, Verdecchia A, Capocaccia R (eds). *Survival of cancer patients in Europe-the EUROCARE study II.* IARC Scientific Publications No.151. Lyons: International Agency for Research on Cancer, 1999, a copy of which is in the House of Commons library.

Ultra-low Sulphur Diesel

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to promote the use of *(a)* LPG, *(b)* ultra-low sulphur petrol and *(c)* ultra-low sulphur diesel in rural areas. [160347]

Mr. Timms: The Budget day reductions in excise duty on all these fuels were designed to encourage the widespread use of more environmentally friendly road fuels throughout the UK.

Government Spending

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product central Government spent on *(a)* education, *(b)* health, *(c)* housing and *(d)* social housing (A) in each year since 1979 and (B) as projected to the end of the current spending review period. [159690]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The information requested is available in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) 2001–02 (Cm5101), tables 3.4 and 3.5. Some series are only published in cash terms, a long run series for money GDP is available from the ONS.

Expenditure is planned on a departmental basis, not a functional basis, and spending plans for expenditure on health, housing, and on social housing are not available on a consistent basis. Forward projections for education spending in cash terms are published in PESA 2001–02 table 1.2.

A consistent long run functional series for central Government expenditure is not currently available—the references are based on total expenditure.

Retirement Flats (VAT)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the average cost to residents of retirement flats of the imposition of VAT on service charges. [158954]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Service charges to residents of retirement flats are exempt from VAT.

Credit Unions

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further action he is taking to establish a central support organisation for credit unions; and if he will make a statement. [160279]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him on 14 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 654W.

Beer Duty

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written representations he has received from the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) asking for the introduction of progressive beer duty. [160199]

Mr. Timms: The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) was a signatory to an early-day motion on progressive beer duty in 1998, but I have received no more recent representations from him on this subject.

Insurance Brokers (Registration) Act

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements have been made to provide continuing access to compensation under the Insurance Brokers Registration Council "Grants and Indemnity Scheme" for general insurance losses incurred by the clients of registered insurance brokers, following the repeal of the Insurance Brokers (Registration) Act 1977 on 30 April. [R] [160599]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The grants scheme was entirely discretionary. But the IBRC had a public law duty to consider reasonably claims that it received under the scheme. The general public law duty does not form a liability that has now transferred to the Treasury under the Insurance Brokers Registration Council Dissolution Order (SI/2001/1283). Nevertheless, the Treasury will consider reasonably claims relating to activities prior to the IBRC's dissolution.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Trial Costs

35. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans he has to place a maximum ceiling on the costs to public funds of trial proceedings. [159324]

Mr. Lock: This Government have taken considerable steps to ensure that trial costs, including lawyers' fees, are held at a reasonable level. It would not be right to place an arbitrary cap on the amount to be spent on any individual trial.

Prosecution Witnesses

36. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many magistrates court trials over the last 12 months for which data are available were *(a)* delayed and *(b)* discontinued as a result of the non-arrival of witnesses for the prosecution. [159325]

Jane Kennedy: The Lord Chancellors Department does not currently collect the information requested.

However, results from twice-yearly witness attendance monitoring exercises, conducted in all magistrates courts for a two-week period in June and November each year, indicates that the number of prosecution witnesses who were expected but did not attend court was 12 per cent. for June 2000 and 7 per cent. for November 2000.

Lay Magistracy

37. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if she will make a statement on the future of the lay magistracy. [159326]

Jane Kennedy: Government Ministers have repeatedly assured Opposition Members of our support for the lay magistracy. Had it not been for opposition from those

Members to the proposed reform to mode of trial procedures, magistrates would by now have been given more work—and a greater variety of work—than they routinely do. Their attitude undermines confidence in the magistracy. I am dismayed to find that there are those who do not believe in their hearts that magistrates can be in charge of a fair trial.

41. **Ms Rosie Winterton:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on her plans for the lay magistracy. [159330]

Jane Kennedy: The report by Rod Morgan and Neil Russell, "The Judiciary in the Magistrates' Courts", published on 14 December last year, concluded that to abolish or greatly diminish the role of the lay magistracy would not be widely understood or supported in the country, and the Government agree with that view.

Lord Justice Auld is currently conducting his independent review of the criminal courts. It would be premature to comment on that until he submits his report.

Auld Report

38. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects the Auld report to be published. [159327]

Mr. Lock: Sir Robin Auld expects to complete his review shortly.

Courthouses (PFI)

39. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many new courthouses have been *(a)* planned and *(b)* built under the private finance initiative. [159328]

Jane Kennedy: No new Crown or county court centres have yet been built under the private finance initiative, although the Court Service has plans to provide four new court buildings under this procurement method. In addition, the Lord Chancellor's Department is providing financial support to a total of 13 magistrates courts committees projects. Eight of those will provide a total of 18 new or refurbished courthouses, six of which are currently under construction and will be in use later this year. The scope of the remaining five projects remains to be determined.

Parallel Juries

40. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent assessment she has made of the case for parallel juries to facilitate research into the reasons behind juries' verdicts. [159329]

Jane Kennedy: There has been no recent assessment of the case for parallel juries. Research into the reasons behind jury verdicts is restricted by section 8 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981.

Family Visitor Appeals

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will provide a breakdown of the number of family visitor appeals *(a)* determined, *(b)* allowed and *(c)* dismissed by the Immigration Appellate Authority (i) at an oral hearing and (ii) on the papers only, in April. [160467]

Jane Kennedy: The breakdown of family visit appeals determined, allowed and dismissed by the Immigration Appellate Authority in April 2001 is:

	Determined	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*
Oral Cases	66	45	21
Paper Cases	131	57	74

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will provide a breakdown of the number of *(a)* oral and *(b)* paper-only family visitor appeals received by the Immigration Appellate Authority in April. [160460]

Jane Kennedy: In April 2001, the Immigration Appellate Authority received 87 cases for oral hearing and 136 cases for paper-only hearing.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of family visitor appeals determined *(a)* at an oral hearing and *(b)* on the papers only, since 2 October 2000, have been allowed. [160468]

Jane Kennedy: The proportion of family visit appeals determined that have been allowed between 2 October 2000 to 30 April 2001 are:

	Percentage
Oral Cases	66.24
Paper Cases	35.60

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* oral and *(b)* paper only family visitor appeals have been received by the Immigration Appellate Authority since (i) 2 October 2000 and (ii) 1 February in which the Immigration Advisory Service has been identified as representing the applicant. [160471]

Jane Kennedy: The amount of family visitor appeals received by the Immigration Appellate Authority since (i) 2 October 2000 and 1 February 2001 in which the Immigration Advisory Service were identified as representing the applicant are as follows:

(iii) Between 2 October 2000 and 31 January 2001 the Immigration Advisory Service represented applicants in *(a)* nine oral family visit appeals *(b)* four paper-only family visitor appeals

(iv) Between 1 February and 30 April 2001 the Immigration Advisory Service represented applicants in *(a)* 31 oral family visit appeals *(b)* six paper-only family visitor appeals.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average time currently taken by the Immigration Appellate Authority is to determine *(a)* oral family visitor appeals, *(b)* paper-only family visitor appeals, *(c)* asylum appeals and *(d)* other immigration appeals. [160472]

Jane Kennedy: The current average time for this business year (April only), by the Immigration Appellate Authority to process cases from receipt to determination, are:

(a) 6.43 weeks for oral family visitor appeals

(b) 3.33 weeks for paper only family visitor appeals

(c) 22.27 weeks for asylum appeals

(d) 20.65 weeks for other immigration appeals.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what the total amount of funding provided by the Legal Services Commission is in respect of family visitor appeals since *(a)* 2 October 2000 and *(b)* 1 February; [160469]

(2) in how many cases the Legal Services Commission has funded legal representation at the oral hearing of a family visitor appeal since *(a)* 2 October 2000 and *(b)* 1 February. [160470]

Jane Kennedy: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Entertainment Budgets

Mr. Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the entertainment budget was for the Lord Chancellor's Department in each year from 1997 to date. [160095]

Jane Kennedy: Expenditure on entertainment in the financial year 1998–99 was £56,327, in 1999–2000 was £88,907 and in 2000–01 was £75,917. The expenditure represented by these figures was incurred by both Ministers and officials. The information for 1997–98 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Civil Justice System

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made on reviewing the remedy of distress for rent as part of the on-going reform of the civil justice system and review of civil enforcement. [160696]

Mr. Lock: As part of the on-going reform of the civil justice system and the review of civil enforcement, we have been reviewing the remedy of distress for rent. We recognise that there are concerns about the current procedure, whereby landlords of (mainly commercial) property can seize their tenants' goods for non-payment of rent, without a court order or any prior notice. The Government accept that some change is necessary and desirable, and the Lord Chancellor has today issued a consultation paper on options for reform of distress for rent. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The aim of this consultation is to:

establish the extent to, and way in which, distress for rent is currently used in both residential and commercial tenancies;

consider the potential effect if it were completely abolished;

consider the potential effect of its abolition in the residential sector; and

seek views on proposals for a modified procedure.

Enforcement Review

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress has been made on the second phase of the enforcement review following the widening of its remit, announced by the Lord Chancellor on 6 March. [160695]

Mr. Lock: A wider remit for phase two of the enforcement review was announced on 6 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 212W. The review has identified the need for independent expert advice from the private, independent and public sectors actively involved in enforcement and a market evaluation of the delivery of enforcement services. An advisory group will therefore be established on the delivery of enforcement services to guarantee openness and transparency.

The broader remit of the enforcement review enables us to set better, more wide-ranging public service agreement targets, ensuring that enforcement is carried out to a consistent standard. The current target (to achieve a 10 per cent. increase in the amount recovered per pound under executed warrants issued in the county courts in 2001–04) was due to be reviewed in July 2001. The new target will need to take account of the findings of the enforcement review, to be more closely linked to service delivery and to measure return to the customer. We will now set new targets for civil enforcement by December 2001 and implement them in 2002.

SCOTLAND

Disability Rights Commission

5. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she next plans to meet the Disability Rights Commission to discuss the promotion of the commission's remit in Scotland. [159293]

Mr. Foulkes: My officials met the Disability Rights Commission on 9 April. I hope to meet the Commission shortly.

Fuel Duties

6. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement about the impact on rural and cross-border transport of fuel duties in Scotland. [159294]

Mr. Foulkes: In his Budget 2001 report, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a number of measures to encourage cleaner road transport, to improve access to cheaper motoring for people who need to use their cars and to enhance the efficiency and environmental sustainability of the UK haulage industry.

This package of measures represents a balance between economic, environmental and social concerns and should help mitigate the impact of fuel costs on rural and cross border transport. All motorists will benefit by an equivalent of four pence per litre cut on fuel duty and hauliers by an equivalent seven pence per litre. The proposed reforms to the lorry vehicle excise duty regime will bring typical duty rates for the cleanest vehicles down to among the lowest in Europe.

Barnett Formula

7. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the First Minister, what discussions she had in relation to reform of the Barnett formula. [159295]

Mrs. Liddell: I meet regularly with my colleague the First Minister to discuss a wide range of issues. This Government have no plans to change the Barnett formula.

10. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent proposals she has put forward about reform of the Barnett formula; and if she will make a statement. [159299]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government have no plans to scrap or to review the Barnett formula. It has provided stable settlements under successive Governments for over 20 years. The Barnett formula is also flexible. It leaves detailed decisions on the allocation of resources for devolved programmes to the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament. Finally, the Barnett formula is fair, because it gives the same overall increases for devolved programmes per head of population in all four parts of the UK.

The Economy

8. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the First Minister to discuss the Scottish economy. [159296]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with the First Minister on a wide range of issues including the commitment of this Government to maintaining in Scotland, as in the whole of the UK, a stable and successful economy, which allows everyone to share in the nation's rising prosperity.

East Ayrshire (Rail Links)

9. **Mr. Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* the Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive about financial support for the improvement of rail links to East Ayrshire. [159298]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government are determined to deliver a safe, modern and high quality railway system. Investment in the railway industry in Scotland, and indeed elsewhere in the UK, is principally a matter for the industry itself. As part of Railtrack's national regeneration scheme, £1.85 million has already been invested in the refurbishment of Kilmarnock Station. Furthermore, Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive has committed funds to extend car parking at Kilmarnock station to 111 spaces, effectively doubling capacity.

The Strategic Rail Authority, under the guidance of the Scottish Executive, has asked Railtrack to cost a number of enhancement options. One option being considered is the creation of a two mile dynamic loop between Stewarton and Dunlop, which would effectively double the single track. This option would have the potential to increase service frequency between Kilmarnock and Glasgow.

Minimum Income Guarantee

11. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to meet pensioner organisations in Scotland to discuss pension levels and the take-up of the Minimum Income Guarantee. [159300]

Mr. Foulkes: We are happy to meet pensioner organisations at any time. The Minimum Income Guarantee has been a great success, taken up by 172,000 claimants in Scotland with some 3,700 in Glasgow Anniesland.

Highlands (Economic Development)

12. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the impact of his Department's policies and programmes on the economic development of the highlands. [159301]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular contact with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on a range of issues. On the basis of the most recent figures available, defence expenditure in Scotland is estimated at approximately £1.8 billion and supports, directly and indirectly, approximately 60,000 jobs. My right hon. Friend is very aware of the importance of defence related contracts to the economy of the Highlands and Islands.

Northern Ireland (Transport Links)

13. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had regarding the future ferry services and improved road links between Scotland and Northern Ireland. [159302]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government are aware of the potential economic benefits of improving transport links between Scotland and Northern Ireland. My Department, in close consultation with the Scottish and Northern Ireland Executives, has been examining the case for a Public Service Obligation to establish a ferry link between Campbeltown and Ballycastle. I am pleased to announce that, in accordance with European Union rules, my Department will now invite potential operators for such a service to come forward with costed proposals. Subject to further evaluation of the costs and benefits of such a service, this will enable the Government to make progress this summer.

Children's Tax Credit

14. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action she is taking to encourage the take-up of the Children's Tax Credit in Scotland. [159303]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend launched the Children's Tax Credit in Scotland at the Inland Revenue's centre in East Kilbride as part of a successful UK campaign to remind people to claim the credit. She also promoted its up-take while visiting Lloyds TSB Scotland in Aberdeen. It can benefit up to 400,000 families in Scotland.

17. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive about methods of publicising the Children's Tax Credit in Scotland. [159306]

Mr. Foulkes: We are in regular contact with colleagues in the Scottish Executive on a wide range of matters. My right hon. Friend launched the Children's Tax Credit in Scotland at the Inland Revenue's centre in East Kilbride as part of a successful UK campaign to remind people to claim the credit. She also promoted its up-take while visiting Lloyds TSB Scotland in Aberdeen. It can benefit up to 400,000 families in Scotland.

Child Poverty

15. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement about the number of children living in poverty in Scotland in each year since 1997. [159304]

Mr. Foulkes: This Government have taken major steps to tackle child poverty since 1997. Measures taken include record increases in universal child benefit, which for the first child has risen in real terms by 26 per cent. since 1997; the Children's Tax Credit, which could benefit up to 400,000 families in Scotland; the Working Families Tax Credit which benefits around 110,000 Scottish families; and the National Minimum Wage which benefits around 120,000 workers in Scotland. The Government have also just published a consultation on two new proposals, the Child Trust Fund and the Saving Gateway, which will take further steps to tackle child poverty.

Tourism

16. **Mr. Alasdair Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the First Minister regarding the tourism industry in Scotland. [159305]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular contact with the First Minister to discuss a wide range of issues. The Government and the Scottish Executive have already committed additional support for Dumfries and Galloway and I will continue to work with my colleagues in the Government and with the Scottish Executive to promote the message that "Scotland is open for business".

Textile Industry

18. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the textile industry in Scotland. [159307]

Mrs. Liddell: I have met with a wide range of people to discuss the Scottish textiles industry. While I am enthusiastic about the extremely high quality of much of Scotland's textiles industry, we have to understand that we cannot compete on costs alone, particularly against low-waged economies. I shall continue to support efforts to promote our excellent textiles industry and to develop new and existing markets which will help to ensure a prosperous and secure future for the industry.

New Deal 50-plus

19. **Mr. Roy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement about the New Deal 50-plus in Scotland. [159308]

Mr. Foulkes: The New Deal 50-plus has proved a very effective way of helping people aged 50 and over return to work. 4,103 people in Scotland have entered work and benefited from the programme in the form of employment credits worth up to £60 per week which guarantees a minimum full-time wage of £9,000 per annum.

Gaelic Language

20. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport about the implementation of the European charter for regional or minority languages regarding the Gaelic language; and if she will make a statement. [159309]

Mr. Foulkes: The Government have made our commitment to the promotion and development of the Gaelic language clear by ratifying the Charter; and we are working with the Scottish Executive to take forward its implementation.

Defence-related Employment

21. **Ms Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Defence Secretary concerning defence-related employment in Scotland. [159310]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular contact with the Ministry of Defence on a range of issues. Scotland continues to benefit, directly and indirectly, from Ministry of Defence employment and spending. On the basis of the most recent figures available, defence expenditure in Scotland is estimated at approximately £1.8 billion and supports, directly and indirectly, approximately 60,000 jobs. Clearly defence expenditure is both substantial and important to the Scottish economy.

Foot and Mouth

22. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement about the responsibilities of her Department in relation to the handling of the foot and mouth outbreak in Scotland. [159311]

Mrs. Liddell: The handling of the foot and mouth outbreak in Scotland is a matter for the Scottish Executive in conjunction with the State Veterinary Service and the armed forces. My Department stand ready to assist in any way including the representation of Scottish interests in Whitehall.

Minimum Wage

23. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the effect of the national minimum wage on wage rates in Scotland. [159312]

Mr. Foulkes: The Office for National Statistics' latest estimate of low pay (combining New Earning Survey and Labour Force Survey statistics) show that the National Minimum Wage is having a direct and beneficial impact on the pay of the lowest paid workers in Scotland. The latest data also show that it has helped close the gap between the highest and lowest earners and helped reduce the differential between men's and women's pay. This has been achieved without any discernible adverse impact on the economy. The minimum wage has benefited at least 120,000 workers in Scotland.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

International Criminal Court

26. **Mr. Browne:** To ask the Advocate-General what discussions she had with the Scottish Executive about the ratification of the Rome statute on the International Criminal Court. [159315]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I have had no such discussions with the Scottish Executive.

Devolution

27. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Advocate-General in what proportion of the devolution issue cases referred to her she has intervened since 3 April. [159316]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: From 3 April to 30 April, 31 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me. Twenty two of these related to delay in criminal proceedings. I have considered each one and judged that no intervention was appropriate.

28. **John Robertson:** To ask the Advocate-General what criteria she applies in reaching her decisions on which devolution issue cases to intervene in. [159317]

The Advocate-General for Scotland: I examine every devolution issue intimated to me before determining whether or not to intervene. The criteria I apply are not rigid, and generally I intervene, at appeal or Privy Council level, where the case raises important issues of principle for the UK as a whole. Many cases involving devolution issues raise similar points and are dealt with satisfactorily by the lower courts and therefore I intervene less frequently at first instance.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

People's Peers

45. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council what recent discussions she has had with the chairman of the House of Lords Appointments Commission on giving rejected applicants for a people's peerage the reasons for their rejection if the applicant so requests. [159334]

Mr. Tipping: None. The Appointments Commission is an independent body and Ministers do not interfere in the way it conducts its business within its terms of reference.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council what the length of tenure of the Chairman of the House of Lords Appointments Commission is; and what plans she has to change the way his successor is selected. [160313]

Mrs. Beckett: Three years. There are no plans to change the way a chairman of the present Appointments Commission might be selected in the future, since the procedure followed the requirements of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if the House of Lords Appointments Commission intends to interview persons recommended for peerages by the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Democrats. [160326]

Mrs. Beckett: No. The Commission has no remit to interview those recommended by the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council what criteria will be used by the House of Lords Appointments Commission in deciding whether to accept persons recommended for peerages by the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Democrats. [160325]

Mrs. Beckett: The Commission carries out the role hitherto exercised by the political Honours Scrutiny Committee. It will look at all persons put forward by the political parties to ensure that they meet the highest standards of propriety. I understand that the Commission has said that it will seek assurances that someone is not and never has been a threat to national security, that he or she has complied in a straightforward way with obligations in relation to taxation and the receipt of benefits and the Commission will take into account any serious criminal offences. Information will also be sought as to any donations made to the party concerned by the individual recommended. The commission has set its approach in a published information pack and on its website.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council on what dates in the current year the House of Lords Appointments Commission plans to undertake regional road shows to encourage potential people's peers to apply. [160314]

Mrs. Beckett: I understand that the Commission has yet to consider detailed plans for its future programme of regional roadshows.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council by what method the Chairman of the House of Lords Appointments Commission was selected; what qualities were sought from applicants; who was involved in the preliminary sift of applications and in the final selection; and if he will make a statement. [160312]

Mrs. Beckett: The Chairman of the House of Lords Appointments Commission was selected by an open selection process conducted in accordance with the rules of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (the "Nolan principles"). The advertisement for the Chairman specified that the Government were looking for someone who:

> Was committed to making the House of Lords a body that is fully representative of all aspects of UK society and culture;
>
> Had a track record of significant achievement in public, private, or voluntary sector organisations;
>
> Had undisputed integrity and the ability to think clearly and exercise sound judgment, and had no positions and interests that might cast doubt on their ability to act impartially;
>
> Could provide a breadth of experience to the Commission;
>
> Had the ability to provide firm leadership, ensuring that the Commission's procedures reflected best public appointments practice;
>
> Could demonstrate excellent communication skills, including managing the media, and the ability to act as a spokesman for the Commission; and
>
> Had a personal style that demonstrated authority, commitment, consistency and fairness in all dealings.

The selection of the name to be recommended to the Prime Minister was made by a panel chaired by the Secretary of the Cabinet, assisted by Lord Fellowes and Ms Ann Abraham, the Legal Services Ombudsman and a member of the Wicks Committee, together with two independent assessors who were Sir Herman Ouseley and Ms Paula Grayson, an independent consultant. The process was assisted by recruitment consultants from PricewaterhouseCoopers, which made a preliminary assessment of applicants suitability against the criteria, but the panel saw and considered all applications.

PDVN Network

47. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the President of the Council what plans she has to bring forward proposals to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to improve the level of investment in the PDVN network. [159337]

Mr. Tipping: The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons is looking at IT provision for Members, but matters such as investment are not within its remit.

Modernisation Proposals

49. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the President of the Council to ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, (Mr. Kirkwood) representing the House of Commons Commission, which staffing reports concerning overloading in Departments of the House have not been acted on in the past two years. [159339]

Mr. Kirkwood: There have been no staffing reports concerning overloading in Departments of the House in the last two years, but the internal review service has scrutinised Departments' manpower forecasts in the context of the annual resource planning exercise.

50. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the President of the Council what proposals she has further to modernise proceedings in the House. [159340]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave today to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne).

Voting Procedures

51. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the President of the Council what proposals she has to speed up voting procedures in the House. [159341]

Mr. Tipping: The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons is keeping voting methods under review.

Health Strategy Sub-committee

52. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the President of the Council if she will make a statement on the role of the ministerial sub-committee on Health Strategy. [159342]

Mrs. Beckett: The terms of reference of the sub-committee are

> "to oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of the Government's health strategy; and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs".

IT Facilities

53. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Council when she expects to implement the Senior Salaries Review Body proposals on information technology facilities for hon. Members. [159343]

Mr. Tipping: The House will first have to decide whether it accepts those recommendations, which I expect to be debated in due course.

Swearing In

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the President of the Council if she will bring forward proposals to the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons on measures to speed up the swearing in of hon. Members following a general election. [160315]

Mrs. Beckett: The procedure for swearing in is set out in the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 and I am afraid that radical change would require primary legislation. Those aspects within the House's control were examined by the Procedure Committee in Session 1995–96, and changes were made as a result of their recommendations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Paid Paternity Leave

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the Government plan to take forward paid paternity leave as announced in the Budget. [160588]

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the Government plan to take forward the paid adoption leave announced in the Budget. [160587]

Mr. Byers: The Budget announced that paid paternity leave and adoption leave would be introduced in 2003. These were based on options put forward in the Green Paper "Work and Parents, Competitiveness and Choice". The introduction of systems for paid paternity leave and paid adoption leave will be a step forward in meeting the Government's aim to improve choice for parents and enhance competitiveness for business.

Paid paternity leave will give working fathers the choice to support their partner around the birth of their child and help adapt to the responsibilities raising a new-born child brings. Paid adoption leave will recognise the commitment given by adoptive families by providing an adoptive parent with the opportunity of 26 weeks leave paid at the flat rate of statutory maternity pay. In addition the Government are to provide a further 26 weeks additional unpaid adoption leave bringing parity with the extension of unpaid maternity leave announced in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) on 1 May 2001, *Official Report,* column 548W.

Both paternity leave and adoption leave received strong support from parents, employers and their representatives in responses to the consultation and during discussions with ministers and officials. Employers and parents asked that wherever appropriate the systems should seek to mirror mothers maternity provisions to aid consistency and simplicity. They also stressed that the systems should adopt a light-touch approach and be as simple as possible to administer.

I have responded to these calls by today publishing frameworks for paid paternity leave and adoption leave based on suggestions put forward. Both frameworks include an assessment of their likely benefits and costs.

The paternity leave framework particularly adopts a number of approaches asked for by employers. To be eligible for paid paternity leave fathers will have to have served a qualifying period. To ease the administration, paternity leave will have to be taken in a single block and taken within the first two months of the child's birth. And the payment mechanism will be similar to that used for SMP.

The adoption leave framework builds on the existing support for adoptive parents. It will be available to those parents adopting children of up to 18 years of age and where couples adopt jointly it will be for them to choose who takes the paid adoption leave.

I welcome comments on these frameworks and have placed copies of the documents in the Library of the House today.

Post Office Network

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on recent developments in the post office network. [160589]

Mr. Byers: I am pleased to announce that the Government have reached agreement for the introduction of Universal Banking Services with 11 major institutions. The terms of a Memorandum of Understanding have been agreed and copies are being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The banks will make their basic bank accounts accessible through the 18,000 post offices in the network, contribute £180 million to the costs of the Post Office card account, and commit to simple and straightforward account opening for those without bank accounts.

This is a major step forward both in ensuring the future of the post office network and in tackling financial exclusion. Universal Banking Services will provide a range of banking services which will enable a new income stream to come into the network and bring those people currently without bank accounts into the financial mainstream.

It is the latest in a number of measures the Government have announced recently to help strengthen the post office network.

In February I announced a new Government fund to help with the costs of relocating and refurbishing rural post offices. Grants to this fund now being considered include proposals to reopen rural offices near Dover and Cardiff. The Government hope to make several more similar grants shortly and this fund could provide the impetus for reopening up to 200 offices nationwide.

In March, we launched the latest phase in order to pilot post offices in Leicestershire and Rutland as "Government General Practitioners"—a new service that will offer a wide range of information and access to Government services aimed at the general public.

Last month I announced the appointment of Allan Leighton to the Board of the new Post Office company, Consignia, as one of five non-executive directors.

The appointment will add to the skills and experience available to Consignia. He will take special interest in the future development of the post office network.

I am informed by the Post Office that, subject to final verification, a net total of 112 urban offices and 435 rural offices closed in the year ending 26 March 2001[1]. Of the closures in the year, only four are permanent.

The primary reason for temporary closures is the retirement of sub-postmasters.

In addition, 123 rural and 46 urban offices reopened in the year. Also, subject to final verification, net closures in the final quarter of the year ending 26 March 2001 were 113.

This indicates a significant downward trend in post office closures compared with the third quarter when net closures were 135 and the first half of the year when closures were running at a rate of 150 per quarter.

This means that during the period April 2000 to March 2001, in the first half of the year net closures were running at 300, whereas in the final half of the year closures were 17 per cent. lower at 248.

This would appear to indicate that the positive and practical steps taken following the performance and innovation unit report in June are having a beneficial effect.

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[1] based on the Post Office's traditional definition of rural offices as those serving communities with under 6,300 residents.

Astra

Mr. Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Department of Trade and Industry took in relation to an application for discovery in the Astra case at the High Court on 28 November 1997; what the costs of the application were to the Department's funds; and if he will make a statement. [160140]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The Department complied with all orders made by the court in the disqualification proceedings in the case of Astra Holdings Plc heard on 28 November 1997.

It is not possible to determine the cost of individual applications in the proceedings without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Moulsdale

Mr. Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he received a request for a copy of the letter relating to Mr. Moulsdale; and what was his response. [160139]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* I am not aware of "the letter relating to Mr. Moulsdale" to which my hon. Friend refers.

Cosmetic Testing

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on *(a)* his policy on a EU ban on cosmetics tested on animals and *(b)* the impact of this policy on the UK-wide ban on cosmetics tested on animals; and if he will make a statement. [160361]

Dr. Howells: The Government are seriously committed to ensuring the protection of animal welfare. Currently the UK has a voluntary ban on animal tests for cosmetic products and ingredients. However, we believe that securing an EU ban on testing cosmetic products and ingredients on animals, as proposed in the Council's draft 7th Amendment to the Cosmetics Directive, is an important step to achieving real improvements in animal welfare across the whole of the European Community.

Supermarkets

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the impact of prohibitions in below-cost selling, with special reference to the recent report of the Competition Commission on the trading restrictions of supermarkets. [160099]

Dr. Howells: The Competition Commission made an adverse finding in relation to persistent selling below cost of certain frequently purchased goods. However, they concluded that a prohibition of the practice would itself have adverse effects, for example consumers might pay more for their shopping basket overall, and that the degree of intervention and monitoring required by a prohibition would be disproportionate to the problem. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry accepted the recommendation made by the Competition Commission not to prohibit below-cost selling of certain frequently purchased goods.

Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason hauliers are excluded from access to the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme. [160405]

Ms Hewitt: The Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme operates under the European Commission Block Exemption Regulations on de minimis aid to small and medium-sized enterprises. This specifically excludes the transport sector.

UK/US Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on recent developments concerning the UK/US Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. [160610]

Dr. Howells: A side letter to the treaty formerly excluded competition cases from its provisions. As part of this Government's policy of improving international co-operation in the fight against international cartels, we have decided that this exclusion is no longer justified. We have therefore agreed with the US Administration that the side letter should be amended in order to bring such cases within the scope of the treaty; an exchange of Notes Verbals dated 30 April and 1 May brings this amendment into effect. The text of this exchange has been laid in the Library of the House.

This action underlines the Government's commitment to improving co-operation in the competition area. In addition, any disclosure of competition-related information to the US will now be subject to the same safeguards as apply in other cases.

Habitats and Birds Directives

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce regulations to apply the Habitats and Birds Directives to the UK Continental Shelf; and when he will be in a position to make licence awards in the Nineteenth Round of offshore petroleum licensing. [160586]

Mr. Hain: I have today laid Regulations which apply the EU Birds and Habitats Directives to offshore petroleum licensing, and activities carried out under those licences. The Regulations introduce, for the first time, a requirement that seismic surveys must be granted consent by the Secretary of State before they can take place. They also cover the granting of authorisations for pipelines and approval of decommissioning plans. They serve to emphasise the importance of marine habitat and species protection.

The Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habitats) Regulations (No 2001/1754), which will come into force on 31 May, take account of a number of helpful comments received by my Department following a wide-ranging public consultation on earlier draft proposals.

These Regulations mark a substantial improvement in the transparency of our environmental and licensing regimes. In particular, the Regulations require that the objectives of the Directives are met not just for habitats that are already identified as needing conservation or protection, but also those that the Government are likely to nominate in the future.

I am also pleased to announce that the DTI has completed the assessment of the applications made in the Nineteenth Round of offshore petroleum licensing against financial, environmental and technical criteria. Environmental factors have been considered in the light of an independent comprehensive strategic environmental assessment of that part of the UK Continental Shelf between the Shetland and Faroes Islands that is the subject of the round (the 'White Zone'), and as though these Regulations were already in force and fully in accordance with the Habitats and Birds Directives. I intend to make licence awards to the following companies, once the Regulations come into force.

Block/Operator	*Partners*
176/20 Amerada Hess Ltd.	BG International (NSW) Ltd. Dong Efterforskning OG Produktion
176/25 Phillips Petroleum Company UK Ltd.	Statoil UK Ltd. Veba Oil & Gas UK Ltd.
104/9 + 204/10 Amerada Hess Ltd.	Texaco North Sea UK Company Dong Efterforskning OG Produktion OMV (UK) Ltd.
204/16 Amerada	BG International (NSW) Ltd. Dong Efterforskning OG Produktion
~~*204/17*~~ Texaco North Sea UK Company	Conoco UK Ltd. EDC (Europe) Ltd.
204/18 BP Exploration Operating Company Ltd.	Shell UK Ltd.
204/21 Amerada Hess Ltd.	BG International (NSW) Ltd. Dong Efterforskning OG Produktion
213/5 + 214/1 Texaco North Sea UK Company	Intrepid Energy North Sea Ltd.
213/26 + 213/27 Texaco North Sea UK Company	

As a result of the licence awards, at least seven exploration wells will be drilled in the White Zone—an area which has world class potential for significant petroleum discoveries. Developments here would provide a significant boost for jobs in Scotland and north-east England as well as boosting the UK economy generally.

Research Spending

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide a breakdown of the regional distribution of *(a)* spending by the Research Councils and *(b)* Government research spending. [160457]

Mr. Alan Johnson: *(a)* Of the £1.449 billion spent by the Research Councils during 1999–2000, £1.271 billion (around 88 per cent.) was spent on research in the UK. The remainder was spent mainly on international subscriptions (7 per cent.) and central expenditure (5 per cent.).

The expenditure in each of the home countries is given in the table.

	£ million	*Percentage*
England	1,098	75.8
Scotland	141	9.7
Wales	28	1.9
Northern Ireland	5	0.3

Using Research Council expenditure in universities only, a distribution of spend in the English Government Office regions and the other home countries can be obtained as follows:

Region	*£ million*	*Percentage*
East	57.7	10.5
East Midlands	28.6	5.2
London	110.5	20.1
North East	16.6	3.0
North West	56.9	10.4
South East	82.9	15.1
South West	27.3	5.0
West Midlands	32.2	5.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	47.7	8.7
England total	460.5	83.8
Scotland	66.1	12.0
Wales	18.2	3.3
Northern Ireland	4.7	0.9
Grand total	549.5	100.0

(b) The following figures for the intramural expenditure for Government Departments, excluding Research Councils, are calculated by the Office for National Statistics on a "pro rata" basis from the regional employment splits.

	£ million	*Percentage*
East	22.9	3.1
East Midlands	4.4	0.6
London	76.7	10.4
North East	0.3	0.04
North West	2.9	0.4
South East	271.3	36.7
South West	115.3	15.6
West Midlands	110.2	14.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	27.7	3.8
England total	631.7	85.8

	£ million	*Percentage*
Scotland	70.6	9.6
Wales	20.6	2.8
Northern Ireland	8.0	1.1
Grand total	730.9	100.0

Post Offices (VED)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many VED licences were issued through post offices in each of the last five years. [160397]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I understand from the Post Office that the numbers of motor vehicle licences issued through post offices in each of the last five years for which verified figures are available was as follows:

Year	*Million*
March 1996	34
March 1997	35
March 1998	35
March 1999	36
March 2000	38

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will bring forward proposals to allow all post office and sub-post office outlets to issue VED licences; and if he will make a statement. [160399]

Mr. Alan Johnson: We are giving active consideration to increasing the number of post offices and sub-post offices that can issue VED licences.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post office outlets there are in Scotland; and how many of these are authorised to issue VED licences. [160398]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I understand from the Post Office that at the end of December 2000 there were 1,948 post offices operating in Scotland, of which 519 were authorised to issue motor vehicle licences.

Textile and Apparel Manufacturing

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what proportion of national industrial capacity is made up of textile and apparel manufacturing; [160253]

(2) what recent representations he has received regarding the future of the United Kingdom textile manufacturing and apparel industry; and if he will make a statement; [160252]

(3) what assessment he has made of the reasons for the declining capacity of the UK textile manufacturing and apparel industry; [160254]

(4) what recent steps his Department has taken in the domestic and international markets to promote the interests of the UK textile manufacturing and apparel industry; [160351]

(5) what recent steps his Department has taken to encourage expansion in the capacity of the UK textile manufacturing and apparel industry. [160255]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government are committed to retaining a viable textile and clothing industry and are keen to ensure that it remains as competitive as possible. With this aim in mind, my Department has worked closely with the industry-led Textile and Clothing Strategy Group (TCSG), which was established in 1999 in response to concerns from the industry about its future. We have extensive contact with the industry but it is through this forum that we receive the most comprehensive representation. The TCSG report, "A National Strategy for the UK Textile and Clothing Industry", was published on 6 June 2000, and includes a series of recommendations for action, directed both at Government and industry.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry together with my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities made an immediate and positive response to these recommendations at the launch of the Strategy with an initial 12 Point Plan for the Industry. This package of measures is designed to enable the industry to develop and to adapt to the challenges of the knowledge economy.

The plan includes measures to support design talent, to promote and support the development and exploitation of technical textile materials as well as additional help to exporters. The extended support for exporters includes the temporary relaxation of the rules for trade fair support to enable more textiles and clothing companies to receive assistance at certain events. Trade Partners UK spent £2.8 million on SESA supported events for the financial year 2000–01 in the textiles and clothing sectors. This compares with £1.5 million in 1999–2000.

The package also provides programmes to help retrain workers who might be affected by decisions that have been taken on closures. Details of the 12-point plan and its implementation and other support available can be found on http://www.dti.gov.uk/support/textile.htm

The Government fully recognise that for a variety of reasons, including globalisation, new technology and restructuring, the textile industry in particular is under significant pressure. Government assistance in total to the textile and clothing industry since coming into office in May 1997 amounts to more than £75 million, including more than £40 million granted to textile and clothing companies by way of regional selective assistance (RSA). This RSA support has been spread across a large number of companies and has led to investment by the companies concerned of a further £250 million, safeguarding or creating 10,000 jobs in the sector.

The DTI's Consumer Goods and Services Directorate is also currently helping to fund around 30 projects aimed at supporting innovation and boosting competitiveness, and these will also encourage growth in the sector and contribute to safeguarding employment.

Value added of the UK textile and clothing industry represented 4.3 per cent. of manufacturing Gross Value Added (0.8 per cent. of total Gross Value Added) in 1999, the latest whole year for which data are available.

Note:

Comprises Standard Industrial Classification Subsection DB—Manufacture of textiles and wearing apparel; dressing and dyeing of fur.

Source:

Office for National Statistics—derived from United Kingdom National Accounts 2000 ("The Blue Book", Table 2.3

Helplines

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159502]

Dr. Howells *[pursuant to the reply, 2 May 2001, c. 686–87W]:* The Chief Executives of the Insolvency Service and the Patent Office have now replied.

Letter from Peter Joyce to Mr. Tom Levitt, dated 8 May 2001:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about telephone helplines administered by The Insolvency Service Executive Agency.

While The Service cannot give advice on specific insolvency problems, it operates the following telephone helplines;

> The Insolvency Service Central Enquiry Line for general enquiries on insolvency procedures. The telephone number is 020 7291 6895 and is manned between 9 am and 5 pm. General enquiries can also be e-mailed to the Central Enquiry Line at Central.Enquiryline@insolvency.gsi.gov.uk
>
> The Service publishes a range of information leaflets. All its publications appear in full on its website at www.insolvency.gov.uk; and can be downloaded or ordered in hard copy from the site or by e-mailing Records.management@insolvency.gsi.gov.uk or from The Insolvency Service Publications Order Line on 0121 698 4241: the order line is manned between 9 am and 5 pm with an answer machine outside those hours on which an order can be left.
>
> The disqualified directors 'hotline' answer machine is open 24 hours a day on 0845 601 3546 for members of the public to provide information about disqualified directors and bankrupts who may be contravening the law. The hotline questionnaire can also be completed and submitted online via the website.

Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses are advertised in The Service's publications and on its website. If a member of the public requires more information or has a query about a particular service or case he/she can contact the relevant Official Receiver Office or Headquarters Section direct: the postal and e-mail addresses and telephone numbers are given on The Service's website at www.insolvency.gov.uk or are available from the Central Enquiry Line.

Letter from Alison Brimelow to Mr. Tom Levitt, dated 8 May 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question tabled on 26 April 2001 which asked the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its Agencies.

The Patent Office, an Executive Agency of the Department of Trade and Industry, operates a Central Enquiry Unit (CEU) to deal with a wide range of intellectual property (IP) enquiries made by telephone, Email, letter and in person. The CEU operators provide advice on general IP issues; detailed advice on particular scenarios; and, handle requests for our entire range of advisory publications.

The telephone helpline can be reached via a single "lo-call rate" number (0845 9 500 505). A "lo-call rate" Minicom service is also available (0845 9 222250). These numbers are advertised on our publications and are also signposted on our website (www.patent.gov.uk) and the intellectual property Portal (www.intellectual-property.gov.uk).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Passport Service

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the United Kingdom Passport Service will publish its Corporate and Business Plan. [160123]

Mr. Straw: The United Kingdom Passport Service Corporate and Business Plan for 2001–06 will be published today and a copy of the plan will be placed in the Library.

HM Chief Inspector of Probation

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has been appointed as the next HM Chief Inspector of Probation; and if he will make a statement. [160597]

Mr. Straw: Recruitment for the post of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation has been run under Commissioner for Public Appointments guidelines following advertisements in the national press. The choice of candidates has been guided by an advisory panel including two independent assessors. As we announced on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 357W, these were Baroness Stern, former Director of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and now Senior Research Fellow at the International Centre for Prison Studies, and Lord Laming, former Chief Inspector of the Social Services Inspectorate.

From the candidates selected by the advisory panel, I have decided to appoint Professor Rodney Morgan as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation. Professor Morgan is Director of the Centre of Criminology, Criminal Justice Faculty of Law at Bristol University and a member of the Parole Board.

I am delighted that Professor Morgan has accepted this appointment, which will take effect from 1 August 2001. Through their expertise and rigour of approach the probation inspectorate has provided a major contribution to building a National Probation Service capable of providing the highest standards of service. I am confident that Professor Morgan will continue that tradition.

Senator Pinochet

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total cost to public funds was of the extradition case of Senator Pinochet. [160723]

Mr. Straw: Four countries (Spain, France, Belgium and Switzerland) sought Senator Pinochet's extradition under the European Convention on Extradition. The final and total cost to public funds of handling these requests was £3,857,108.58. The breakdown of this is as follows:

Costs Incurred by the Home Office: £670,588.82

Treasury Solicitor's fees: £63,150.000'

Disbursements (mainly Counsel's fees): £292,385.93'

Costs of the Kingdom of Belgium and Amnesty International: £155,081.68

Costs of Medical Examination on 5 January 2000: £11,751.25

> Responding to public correspondence (this covers staff costs where letters were handled in house and Central Office of Information fees where letters were contracted out): £10,941.05

Staff Costs (estimated): £165,778.91

[1] Of these two amounts £28,500.00 was recovered from Senator Pinochet under costs orders made against Senator Pinochet by the High Court.

Costs Incurred by the Crown Prosecution Service: £676,691.00

Counsel's fees: £425,077.00

Staff Costs (estimated): £137,055.00

Other Costs (interpreters, travel and subsistence and photocopying): £114,559.00

Costs Incurred by the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers: £60,000.00

Staff Costs (estimated): £60,000.00

Costs Incurred by the Lord Chancellor's Department: £1,209,775.05

> The Law Lords ordered that Senator Pincohet's costs should be met from Central Funds for the first two hearings before the House of Lords in the unusual circumstances of the case. The costs paid from Central Funds were as follows:
>
> > for the first hearing in the House of Lords: £270,935.89; and
> >
> > for the application to set aside the judgment following the first hearing in the House of Lords: £151,361.30
>
> The costs of those Divisional court hearings in which Senator Pinochet was successful or which did not proceed, and the costs of the committal proceedings in Bow Street Magistrates court from 27 September to 1 October 1999, were also order to be paid from Central Funds. The costs of these hearings were £787,477.86.
>
> All these costs were ordered to be paid under Section 16 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, and they fall to be paid out of the Lord Chancellor's Department's portion of central funds.
>
> Senator Pinochet received no legal aid funding in any of the proceedings against him.

Treasury Solicitor's Fees: £100,053.76

Amicus Curiae (costs and disbursements including Counsel's fees): £71,029.00

Other costs and disbursements: £29,024.76

Security Costs: £1,200,000.00

> Responsibility for Senator Pinochet's protection and detention were the responsibility of the Metropolitan police. For security reasons, it has long been the practice of successive Governments not to provide information about police operations relating to protection.
>
> The costs incurred by Surrey police relating to general policing and public order matters in relation to Senator Pinochet's residence in Wentworth were £1,200,000.00.
>
> All these figures include Value Added Tax where appropriate.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Records Bureau will publish its Corporate and Business Plan. [160689]

Mr. Straw: The Criminal Records Bureau Corporate and Business Plan has been published today and a copy of the plan has been placed in the Library.

Prison Service

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the use of the private sector in the Prison Service. [160691]

Mr. Straw: I have asked Pat Carter, a non-executive member of the Strategy Board for Correctional Services, to carry out a review on the future role of the private sector in the prison system.

I will publish his review and the Government's response to it in due course.

European Refugee Fund

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the organisations which successfully bid for 2000 and 2001 reception and integration funding under the European Refugee Fund. [160687]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The successful bidders are:

Reception

Agroforep

Provides skills training to 15 people, supporting 10 children with homework, 20 children/youth in language of country of origin, and providing education and health advice to a minimum of 50 refugees.

Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Day Centre

Provides a range of information technology (IT) resources for an estimated 205 Turkish and Kurdish refugees, including an after school club of 8 to 16-year-olds.

Derby City Council

Provides advice work, policy development and individual/group work to build community capacity initiatives for the reception of approximately 520 asylum seekers.

Housing Association Charitable Trust (HACT)

Aims to support 38 refugee community organisations in delivering housing and related services to in excess of 6,780 clients.

Leicester City Council

Provides a casework service for 900 refugees in order that they are able to access housing, education, employment and health services.

Refugee Council

Assists clients with particularly complex needs; also unaccompanied minors.

Save the Children (Heathrow)

Provides child-friendly facilities at Heathrow Airport for 192 unaccompanied minors, and recruits, trains and manages a dedicated adviser to work with them.

Somali Advisory Bureau

Assists long-term unemployed Somali refugees and their families by providing counselling, advocacy and advice on employment, training and welfare issues.

Society of Voluntary Associates (SOVA)

Provides health, accommodation and immigration advice to unaccompanied minors and also provides for the recruitment and training of volunteers.

Tamil Relief Centre (TRC)

Provides support and guidance to bridge cultural and language barriers of children, and also English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and basic skill classes for adult refugees. They will also access accommodation, health and welfare advice through existing TRC benefits. Sixty people will benefit from this project.

Integration

Anyadwe Families Association

Provides extra educational support to 250 children of refugees and asylum seekers.

Asphaleia Project

Provides 10 unaccompanied minors with English language support, cultural guidance and work experience in order to better equip them for employment.

Bolton Ethnic Minority Achievement Service

Provides a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to ease the induction of 230 asylum seekers and refugees into Bolton by way of awareness and skill development according to need.

Bournemouth Churches Housing Association

A rent deposit loan scheme, to enable 230 properties to be accessed by refugees/those granted Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR).

Child Psychotherapy Trust

Provides a therapy service to 20 refugee children and support to their families.

Civic Trust

Produces a handbook on good practice for mental health professionals and refugee community organisations in delivering culturally appropriate mental health service to refugees.

East Lancashire Asylum and Refugee Support

Provides for the training and managing of 20 volunteers to provide a one-stop service for those granted refugee status/ELR.

East London Somali Association

Provides an advocacy/outreach service to enable between 3,000 and 4,000 Somali nationals annually to access services such as education, health and welfare support.

Ethnic Minority Achievement Team, Lambeth

Provides an induction programme to deliver key skills in literacy, numeracy and IT to 30 students in the 14–16 age category, and also funds two refugee support teachers and two bilingual assistants to deliver the programme.

Employability Forum

Addresses the needs of refugees with professional qualifications and experience who seek employment in the United Kingdom.

Ethiopian Association in Haringey

Provides ESOL and IT training to in excess of 100 Ethiopian refugees.

Glasgow North Ltd.

Assists in widening employment opportunities for 300 refugees.

Glasgow Young Men's Christian Association

Provides accommodation after National Asylum Support Service (NASS) support ends; arranges, where appropriate, English training and cultural life skills.

Hackney and Islington Refugee Training Partnership

Provides customised vocational training in ESOL for 144 refugees, job-search and careers advice for 250 refugees and general advice and advocacy for 500 refugees.

Hammersmith and Fulham Community Law Centre

Establishes a local Refugee Forum, providing 30 annual projects in areas such as employment, health, education, training and benefits advice, to hundreds of refugees.

London Action Trust

Aims to improve access to benefits, education, training, employment and overall support to refugees who have offended and are on probation within the Probation Service.

Middle East Christian Minorities Advice Centre

Provides information and advice to between 400 and 500 refugees in areas such as eduction, training, employment, health, social and cultural needs. The project also offers help in domestic violence situations and advises on how women can access the police, legal advice and social workers/welfare officers.

North East Consortium for Asylum Support Services (NECASS)

Assists, supports and enables refugees towards long-term settlement in the north east via the use of Innovative Inter Co-ordination Team (ICT).

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)

Provides ESOL training to unemployed refugees, and fast track IT training to highly skilled refugees. There will be an estimated 300 participants.

Nottingham City Council Housing

Improves access to benefits, accommodation, training and employment, in order to encourage resettlement locally, for approximately 400 refugees.

PECAN Ltd.

Provides ESOL training to unemployed refugees in general and fast-track IT training for highly skilled refugees in particular. An estimated 300 participants.

Portsmouth City Council

Provides mental health support for between 250 and 350 refugees and asylum seekers in a community based day-care facility.

Refugee Council

Promotes better access to key services—health, education, employment, benefits, housing for at least 15,500 refugees in the regions.

Refugees into Jobs

Provides a grant scheme for 100 refugees covering child care, travel costs, materials and books, employment or work placement materials, tuition and examination fees, business start-up costs.

Refugee Women's Association

Creates a network of mental health and social care support services to enable 1,200 refugee women to integrate into United Kingdom society.

Save the Children (Scotland)

Develops educational initiatives to promote the integration of 160 school-aged refugees/asylum seekers, 80 per cent. of whom have refugee status.

Slough Borough Council

Provides for two outreach workers to help refugees or those with ELR to integrate into host community. Encouraging self-reliance, concentrating on skills assessment and employment opportunities.

Somali Cultural Centre

Consolidates and expands the advice service, ensures appropriate service provision.

TLC College

Provides an employment and settlement project to increase the access of 500–600 refugees to education, training and employment.

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council

Provides staff and services in the areas of employment, accommodation and education.

Waltham Forest Youth Service

Provides a youth project for groups of 150 unaccompanied minors and young refugees to meet each other and break down cultural barriers.

Arson Control Forum

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Arson Control Forum new projects bidding exercise. [160690]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am very pleased to announce today the award of £1 million of grants by the Arson Control Forum to fire brigades in England and Wales for arson reduction initiatives.

The Arson Control Forum was established last year with the aim of reducing the incidence of deliberate fires by 30 per cent. of the 1998–99 baseline by 31 March 2009; the desired outcome is to cut maliciously set fires from the current figure of 77,900 to 54,500 during this period. To achieve this aim, the Forum has been allocated a budget of £3.5 million over the three year period from April 2001. Some of this money will be used to fund research into the causes and prevention of arson, but most will be used to fund local fire brigade anti-arson initiatives. The size of the budget available to fund local projects this year is £1 million.

The Chair of the Forum, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services, Graham Meldrum, wrote to all Chief Fire Officers inviting bids to be submitted to the Home Office by 31 March 2001. By the closing date for the exercise, we had received a total of 44 bids from 40 brigades, totalling £1,609,320.

The bids were evaluated in accordance with Home Office procurement guidelines. All bids were carefully considered and we have agreed to wholly or part fund 25 of the 44 received, amounting to £996,664. Those bids that were successful met the following criteria:

> They had to show they had a good understanding of the scale of the arson problem in their area;
>
> They had to propose a solution which was geared to addressing the problem they had described;
>
> They had to say how the project would be managed;
>
> They had to say how they would measure success; and
>
> They had to show how the project would provide value for money.

The projects we will be supporting range from those that have been successful elsewhere, such as the establishment of an arson task force comprising the fire, police and social services. Other projects are concentrating upon particular issues, such as arson in schools, vehicle arson or the development of community based solutions. The focus of all these projects has been partnership, either with the police, social services, the local authorities, schools and a range of others.

There has also been a wide geographical spread. There are projects from Wales to Kent, and from the South West and the Midlands to the North West and East of England. The projects also range widely in terms of their target areas, from the inner-cities to rural areas, where the arson problem is often greater than people realise.

The following projects have been supported.

Projects supported by the Arson Control Forum

Brigade	*£000*	*Description of project*
Avon	40,000	Vehicle arson reduction scheme
Bucks	8,000	Vehicle arson reduction scheme
Cheshire	40,000	Support to police involvement in arson reduction
Cornwall/Devon	58,000	Arson Task Force
Cumbria	36,000	Arson audit scheme
Derbyshire	34,000	Arson Reduction Co-ordinator
Dorset	62,000	Vehicle arson reduction scheme
East Sussex	10,000	Young offenders project
Hampshire	30,000	Collaborative data sharing project
Kent	80,000	Vehicle arson reduction scheme
Lancashire	50,000	Arson Task Force
Leicestershire	38,000	Arson Task Force
Lincolnshire	20,000	Provision of IT system to support arson reduction
London	59,000	Arson Task Force
Luton and Beds	60,000	Arson Task Force
Merseyside	35,000	Arson counselling scheme
Mid and West Wales	108,000	Arson Task Force
North Yorks	30,000	Arson Task Force
Northumberland	21,000	Arson Reduction Co-ordinator
Shropshire	50,000	Arson Task Force
Suffolk	1,000	Provision of IT system to support arson reduction
Tyne and Wear	60,000	Arson Task Force
West Midlands	15,000	Hydrocarbon detector dog
West Yorks	38,000	Schools arson audit
Wilshire	13,000	Rural arson awareness scheme
Total	996,000	

Coroners (Review)

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will appoint the chairman for the fundamental review of the coroner system. [160780]

Mr. Boateng: I will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers and refugees have been allocated for dispersal to *(a)* the Grimsby cluster, *(b)* North Lincolnshire, *(c)* Lincolnshire and *(d)* East Riding; and on what basis the numbers going to each was decided. [158916]

Mrs. Roche: As at the end of April 2001, 20[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) were allocated accommodation in Grimsby by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). No asylum seekers were allocated NASS accommodation in north Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire or East Riding.

There are a number of factors that decide allocation including availability of accommodation, the individual merits of the case and local circumstances.

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest 10

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications *(a)* are awaiting a decision by his Department and *(b)* have been appealed against a refusal of asylum on non-compliance grounds, which were made by nationals of *(a)* Somalia, *(b)* Sierra Leone, *(c)* Afghanistan, *(d)* Iraq, *(e)* Sri Lanka and *(f)* Congo. [159579]

Mrs. Roche: Information on the total number of applications awaiting an initial decision is published monthly on the web page:

http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

The latest information on the number of applications outstanding at the end of 1999 by nationality is published in table 4.2 of the Asylum Bulletin.

Information on the number of appeals against refusals on non-compliance grounds is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of the individual case files.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been dispersed under the voluntary scheme from *(a)* North East Lincolnshire, *(b)* North Lincolnshire, *(c)* Lincolnshire, *(d)* North Yorkshire and *(e)* Cumbria. [159734]

Mrs. Roche: The information requested is not available. Statistics are not held centrally on the location of asylum seekers dispersed by local authorities under the voluntary dispersal scheme, as this scheme was the responsibility of local government.

Crime (North-west)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* robberies and *(b)* violent crimes in the north-west there were in each of the years from 1997 to date. [160081]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The table shows robbery and violent crime recorded crime statistics in the north-west, (the police force areas of Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside) for the calendar year 1997, subsequent fiscal years and the year ending September 2000.

Recorded crime for North West Government Office Region

	Robbery	*Violent crime*
1997	9,702	46,224
1997–98	10,116	50,503
1998–99	11,614	87,039
1999–2000	12,911	93,029
1999–2000[1]	13,795	92,804

[1] Year ending September

Note:

It should be noted that, owing to the change in the Home Office's rule counting and classifying crime on 1 April 1998, figures for recorded crime before and after that date are not directly comparable.

Haase Case

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications of the Haase case; and if he will review the criteria for the exercise of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy. [160375]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The use of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy to remit a prison sentence is a very rare occurrence and it is used only in exceptional circumstances. Partially as a result of its use in the case of John Haase, I commissioned a review of the exercise of the Royal Prerogative of Mercy. This was completed recently and I am carefully considering the findings and recommendations of the review report.

Detective Sergeant Peter Williams

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will initiate a review of the case of former Detective Sergeant Peter Williams, of the south-east regional crime squad. [160374]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that former Detective Sergeant Peter Williams, of the south-east regional crime squad, was dismissed from the Metropolitan Police service on 15 September 1999, having been found guilty of a number of disciplinary offences.

The disciplinary action taken against Mr. Williams was under the Police (Discipline) Regulations 1985. Under these regulations, a police officer found guilty of disciplinary offences has a right of appeal to the Secretary of State. Mr. Williams has not chosen to appeal against the offences for which he has been found guilty.

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that there is no intention to review the case of former Detective Sergeant Peter Williams.

Circuit Judges

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the reduction in the total number of circuit judges which will result from the anticipated reduction of cases held at Crown court following the implementation of the Criminal Justice (Mode of Trial) Bill. [160404]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Any savings in Crown court resources, which would result from the proposals in the Bill, would be dedicated to cases which genuinely need to be tried in the Crown court. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor therefore has no plans to reduce the number of circuit judges.

Illegal Entrants

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal entrants to the United Kingdom were apprehended at the Eurotunnel terminal at Cheriton *(a)* in March, *(b)* in April and *(c)* since 1 January. [159681]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* In March this year 528 stowaways were apprehended at Cheriton, having gained unauthorised access to the Eurotunnel terminal at Coquelles and then boarding the company's freight shuttles. Up to midnight on 25 April, 508 stowaways were apprehended. From 1 January to midnight on 25 April, the figure is 1,703.

Eurotunnel, who are responsible for security of the terminal and the trains at Coquelles, have commenced construction of an inner cordon of fencing around the platform and allocation areas where lorries wait to board the shuttles. This is scheduled to be completed by 31 May, however, the Immigration Service have asked for this to be accelerated.

Entry Clearance

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the numbers who would benefit from the introduction of a concession to all those children who were wrongly refused entry clearance to join their families in the United Kingdom as a result of the ECO deciding that they were not related as claimed; and if he will explain how this figure has been arrived at. [159833]

Mrs. Roche: There is no reliable way of estimating the numbers who have been refused entry clearance on the basis that they were not related as claimed and where subsequent information proves that relationship. Neither can we reliably estimate the numbers who would benefit from the introduction of a concession to allow entry clearance in such cases.

What we do know is that, in those cases where applicants were refused entry clearance on the basis that they were not related to the sponsor, the decisions of entry clearance officers were taken in good faith on the best evidence available at the time. We also know that, if such a concession were introduced, the pool of potential reapplicants, refused entry clearance over many years, would be very large.

Family Visitor Appeals

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the net income has been from fees for family visitor appeals since 1 April; and how much of this net income relates to appeals which are still outstanding. [160464]

Mrs. Roche: The figures are not available in the form the hon. Member seeks, because of the number of appeals outstanding from the end of the last period. We calculate that the net income from fees for family visitor appeals in the period 2 October to 3 May 2001 is about £65,000. Of this, 48 per cent. relates to appeals which are currently outstanding and which may result in further refunds.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total net income was from fees for family visitor appeals between 2 October 2000 and 31 March; and how much of that net income relates to appeals which are still outstanding. [160465]

Mrs. Roche: We calculate that the net income from fees for family visitor appeals in the period 2 October to 31 March 2001 is about £60,000. Of this, 48 per cent. relates to appeals which were outstanding on 31 March and which may result in further refunds.

Immigration

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations giving immigration advice for profit are registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner; and how many such organisations are in the process of registering with the OISC. [160466]

Mrs. Roche: I understand that as of 4 May 2001, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) had received 89 registration applications from individuals providing immigration advice for profit and 49 such applications from organisations comprising two or more practitioners. Of these applications, 31 individuals and 16 organisations are now registered with the OISC; the remaining applications are under consideration.

Youth Offending Teams

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 255W, when he intends to publish the inspection reports of the *(a)* Bournemouth and Poole and *(b)* Caernarfon youth offending teams; when inspection will commence on the other youth offending teams in the pilot; and if he will make a statement. [160458]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Two youth offending team inspections have been carried out by multi-disciplinary inspection teams who are considering their reports. They cover Bournemouth and Poole and Carmarthen, to which I assume the hon. Member is referring. The Carmarthen report will be published by the National Assembly for Wales in the summer. Publication arrangements are being made for the Bournemouth and Poole report, but the timing has yet to be decided. Decisions on which further areas to cover will be taken once the Youth Justice Board has completed its consideration of the future conduct of inspection and its own range of independent evaluation and monitoring of youth offending teams.

Chief Probation Officer for London

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil servants have transferred to the office of the Chief Probation Officer for London; what their functions are; what the total cost to the Probation Service is; and if he will make a statement. [160473]

Mr. Boateng: This is a matter for the Board and the Chief Officer of the London Probation Area who arranged for the secondment of two Home Office civil servants to assist the Area through a period of considerable change. Their role and cost to the London Probation Area are matters for the Board and Chief Officer.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of answering parliamentary question (Ref 159969) from the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). [160501]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Answering this parliamentary question is estimated to have cost the Home Office less than £25. Exact records of the time taken were not kept.

Stop and Search

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many stops and searches were conducted *(a)* in total and *(b)* per 1,000 population, and what percentage resulted in an arrest, in each police force area in England and Wales in 2000–01 broken down by ethnic origin of those stopped and searched. [160459]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Such information for 2000–01 is not yet available centrally. The latest information available on the ethnic appearance of persons stopped and searched relates to 1999–2000 and was published by the Home Office in "Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System", a copy of which is in the Library.

Departmental Policies (Vale of Clwyd)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information, the effects of his Department's policies and actions in relation to animal welfare since 2 May 1997, for the Vale of Clwyd. [160615]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Home Office has put in place a number of measures affecting animal welfare throughout Great Britain since 1997. I do not have separate information on the Vale of Clwyd, but I am able to provide details of what the Home Office has achieved at a national level since 1997.

We are continuing to work to ensure that the highest possible standards of welfare are applied to animals used in scientific procedures and that they are used only where it is fully justified—where the benefits outweigh the costs and where there are no suitable alternatives. To this end, we are promoting the fullest application of the 3Rs—the replacement of procedures with others which do not use animals, the reduction of the number of animals used and the refinement of procedures to minimise pain and suffering.

In addition to our commitment to the 3Rs, the other main individual measures this Government have introduced since the election to ensure that animals are used only where fully justified are as follows. We have:

secured a voluntary ban on testing cosmetic finished products on animals;

increased the budget made available to the Animal Procedures Committee to sponsor research on alternatives by 45 per cent. to £265,000 for 2000–01;

banned the use of animals to test alcohol and tobacco products;

increased the size of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate from 18 to 21, and recruited seven new inspectors to fill these and other vacancies and recently announced plans to further increase numbers to 33 over the next three years;

introduced a requirement that all establishments licensed under the 1986 Act have local ethical review processes as a complement to the existing controls under the Act. We are now reviewing those processes to ensure dissemination of best practice;

announced our intention never to allow the use of Great Apes (gorillas, chimpanzees, pygmy chimpanzees and orang-utans);

announced that licenses for monoclonal antibody production by the ascites method will not be granted other than in exceptional circumstances; and

ended the licensing of the LD50 test and of tests for skin corrosivity and phototoxic potential where valid alternatives exist.

The number of scientific procedures in Great Britain in 1999 was nearly 2.66 million—very slightly down on 1998. The number of animals used was 2.57 million, about 24,000 fewer than in 1998. With the exception of 1997 this is the lowest number since 1955.

The overall reduction in the use of animals reflects the Government's commitment to applying the principles of the 3Rs to all animal testing in the United Kingdom. However, it is very difficult to project the number of animals to be used in future years. Numbers depend on the type of project licence applications that will be made and progress on current project licences, as well as global trends in scientific endeavour.

Other support given to animal welfare includes:

backing a private Member's Bill which became the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999, a measure aimed at tightening regulation of commercial dog breeding establishments, and issue to local authorities of related detailed guidance;

preparation, with the Association of Circus Proprietors, of a code of practice on the care and welfare of animals in travelling circuses; and

making an Order that allows for an indefinite prohibition of the culling of seals on the east coast of England, which has assisted in the recovery of common seals to pre-1988 numbers when a virus decimated their population—by 1999 their number had risen to 3,600 just 400 down on 1988 numbers.

Detention Centres

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in which financial year he expects the Oakington Reception Centre first to deliver savings in asylum support costs; [159401]

(2) in which financial year the Oakington Reception Centre will deliver the annual saving in asylum support costs referred to on page 65 of his Department's Annual report. [159399]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The potential savings identified in the annual report were based on operating at full capacity for a full financial year. Oakington has been capable of operating at full capacity since 28 January 2001. We expect some savings in support costs to have resulted from the first year of operation.

Special Secure Units

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are detained in each special secure unit, indicating *(a)* the crimes for which each prisoner was convicted, *(b)* the national origin and citizenship of the prisoner, *(c)* the ethnic group of the prisoners, *(d)* the aggregate length of time the prisoner was in SSU accommodation, *(e)* the month and year in which the prisoner's last two formal three-monthly medical reviews took place and *(f)* the representations he has received following observations made by medical examiners. [159553]

Mr. Boateng: On 30 April 2001, eight prisoners were being held in special secure units (SSUs), six at Whitemoor prison and two at Belmarsh prison. Only prisoners categorised as category A exceptional escape risk are held in SSUs. We are not aware of any representations being submitted following observations made by medical examiners. The table gives the other information requested.

Offence	*Origin*	*Ethnic Group*	*Aggregate time spent in SSU*	*Dates of last two 3-monthly medical reviews*
Conspiracy to supply drugs	British	Asian	22 months	September 2000-January 2001
Supply drugs	Turkish	Asian	20 months	September 2000-January 2001
Importation of drugs	Colombian	White	46 months	September 2000-January 2001
Importation of drugs	Turkish	White	13 months	September 2000-January 2001
Attempted murder	British	Black	9 months	September 2000-January 2001
Supplying drugs	British	White	7 months	September 2000-January 2001
Supplying drugs	British	White	9 months	December 2000-April 2001
Murder	British	White	11 months	January 2001-April 2001

Animal Welfare

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the code of practice for the care and welfare of circus animals on tour. [160782]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The code of practice for the care and welfare of circus animals has now been written by the Association of Circus Proprietors and it will be distributed to local authorities soon. It is not a Home Office document, contrary to a press report.

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to give better protection to animals; and if he will make a statement. [160781]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Sex Offenders Act

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the report of the review of Part 1 of the Sex Offenders Act 1997. [160692]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Emergency Planning Legislation

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for reviewing the emergency planning legislation; and if he will make a statement. [160724]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 100W.

I will make a further announcement as soon as possible.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, what the average kinetic energy on impact is at *(a)* one metre, *(b)* five metres, *(c)* 10 metres, *(d)* 20 metres, *(e)* 30 metres, *(f)* 50 metres, *(g)* 75 metres and *(h)* 100 metres of the *(i)* L5A7 baton round and (ii) L21A1 baton round fired from the L104 anti-riot gun; and what his assessment is of the probability of lethality following impact to the (A) head, (B) thorax and (C) abdomen for each of these KE measures. [158040]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The table shows the average (mean) kinetic energy in Joules (J) of the L21A1 baton round from a clamped L104 gun, and for the L5A7 baton round.

Range	*Kinetic energy of L21A1*	*Kinetic energy of L5A7*
2 m	257J	274J
20 m	244J	246J
35 m	230J	216J
50 m	215J	200J

There are no experimental data for kinetic energy at 1 m, 5 m, 10 m, 75 m, or 100 m; kinetic energy at these ranges could be estimated from the table.

The probability of impacts to the head and upper thorax by the L21A1 will be significantly less than the incidence of impact to these areas by the L5A7. This is due to the improved accuracy and consistency achieved by the L21A1 weapon system.The probability of lethality to the head, thorax and abdomen, given an impact to these regions, cannot be calculated accurately. The assessment of the injury potential of the L21A1 batons round was undertaken as a comparative study between the two projectiles using computer and physical models of the biomechanical response of these regions, and the severity of specific injuries. The conclusions of the studies are described in the DSAC report placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, if he will list the companies involved in the manufacture of the *(a)* L21A1 plastic baton round, *(b)* L104 anti-riot gun and *(c)* XL18E3; where each company is based; and what the cost of Government contracts was with each of these companies in each of the past 10 years. [158039]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

I am withholding this information in accordance with exemptions 1 and 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, what assessment he has made of the consequences of ricochet of an L21A1 plastic baton round *(a)* under, *(b)* within and *(c)* beyond the normal operating range. [158046]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The normal operational range of the L21A1 baton round is 20–40 m. The L21A1 baton round is more accurate than the L5A7 baton round, particularly at longer range, and the incidence of baton rounds missing the target and subsequently ricocheting behind the target will be significantly reduced.

The new optical gun-sight is set to direct the L21A1 baton towards the lower part of the body, away from the potentially vulnerable areas of the upper thorax and head. At the furthest normal operating ranges, a small proportion of the L21A1 batons may strike the ground just before they hit the lower part of the body. The guidance to firers allows for compensatory action (ie to aim off) at these distances to reduce the risk of ricochet. In the event that a ricochet were still to occur, we would expect baton rounds to ricochet below the vulnerable areas of the head and upper thorax.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, what the cost was of each of the four DSAC studies. [158044]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The Defence Scientific Advisory Council sub-committee members engaged on the independent medical assessment placed in the Library of the House on 2 April and on the three preceding statements mentioned in the assessment, incurred the following costs, made up of fees and travelling expenses:

(a) Statement dated 18 October 1999—£3,552

(b) Statement dated 18 January 2000—£3,308

(c) Statement dated 18 April 2000—£1,394

(d) Statement dated 21 August 2000—£1,223

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, what the *(a)* mass, *(b)* velocity, *(c)* shape, *(d)* aerodynamic properties, *(e)* composition and *(f)* stiffness is of the (i) L21A1 and (ii) L5A7; and if he will make a statement. [158038]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The data in the table for the mass, velocity and hardness are taken from the respective schedule of proof for the two batons.

	L21A1	*L5A7*
Mass	96.5–99.2g	132–135g
Minimum and maximum velocity (at 2 m)	69–76 m/s	55–70 m/s
Mean velocity range (at 2 m)	70–74 m/s	60.5–65.0 m/s
Shape	37 mm calibre with a 9 mm nose edge radius and a boat-tail on the base	37 mm calibre with a 3 mm nose and base edge radius
Aerodynamic properties (estimated drag coefficient, C_d)	0.24	0.64
Composition	Polyurethane polymer	Polyurethane polymer with an additive to increase density
Hardness (°IRHD)	92–95	85–90

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W on baton rounds, if he will place in the Library *(a)* the outline plan of the technical assessment drawn up by DERA, Porton Down and endorsed by the DSAC, *(b)* the results of firing trials and impact modelling used to compare the performance of the L5A7 and L21A1 baton rounds and *(c)* studies conducted on post ricochet trajectories and energy of L21A2 baton rounds, indicating what the probability of impact to the (i) upper torso and (ii) head is, and what the cause of inaccuracy in the L21A1 delivery system was at the 40 metre range. [158538]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, a copy of an independent medical assessment of the new baton round was placed in the Library on 2 April. The key conclusions of the documents requested can be found in this report. I am withholding the documents themselves in accordance with exemptions 2 and 11 of the code of practice on access to Government information which relate respectively to internal discussion and advice and to incomplete analysis. The problem of inaccuracy at 40m was discovered during tests and addressed by a change to the gun zeroing policy.

Defence Scientific Advisory Council

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, if he will list the *(a)* individuals that sit on the Defence Scientific Advisory Council, *(b)* qualifications and employment profile of each member, *(c)* remuneration paid to each member and *(d)* terms of reference of the Council. [158041]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The Defence Scientific Advisory Council (DSAC) is an advisory body offering independent advice to Ministers and senior officials. Currently it has over 170 members drawn from industry and academia. It reports annually to the Secretary of State. It also sets up working parties comprising some of its members, to draw up advisory reports, or assessments, on particular scientific topics from time to time. One such assessment was referred to in the written answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department on 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W. I am withholding details of individuals undertaking this work in accordance with Exemptions 2 and 4 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Current remuneration of DSAC members is according to the table.

	£ per day
DSAC Chairman	315
Sub-committee Chairman	265
Members	210

DSAC members are also paid travel and subsistence. The terms of reference of the DSAC are as follows:

a. To review the scientific and technological aspects[1] of research and development programmes being undertaken in, and on behalf of, the MOD to meet the needs of the armed forces cost effectively.

b. To advise on the most effective uses of scientific resources within the defence research programme.

c. To advise on changes to the scope and balance of the defence research programme in MOD.

d. To advise on the quality and value for money of research carried out for the MOD.

e. To advise on scientific and technological developments from outside the MOD, including emerging new threats and opportunities for beneficial international collaboration.

f. To advise on problems referred to it.

[1] Includes medical science and technology.

In performing these tasks it will take account of relevant advances in the civil field including opportunities for technology transfer in both directions between MoD and the civil sector.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, if he will place in the Library *(a)* the three unpublished statements of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council and *(b)* the Ministry of Defence and ACPO terms of reference of each. [158043]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply. I am withholding the information requested in accordance with exemptions 2 and 11 of the code of practice on access to Government information which relate respectively to internal discussion and advice and to incomplete analysis. The key conclusions of the statements requested can be found in the report of the DSAC sub-committee placed in the Library on 2 April.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were successfully prosecuted for *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax benefit fraud in each local authority in the latest year for which records are available. [158687]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

The information has been placed in the Library.

Strip Searches (Prison)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the recommendations of the Prison Service "Searches on the Person" Review indicating the progress made in the implementation of each proposal. [159551]

Mr. Boateng: Six recommendations have been implemented in full, and the security manual has been updated accordingly. On another seven recommendations, work has commenced towards full implementation. There are still three recommendations on which work has yet to start.

The review recommendations will be considered when the security manual chapters on searching are reviewed by the security manual project team. Given the importance of searching, it has been decided to review the searching chapter first.

Progress on the recommendations is as follows. The six recommendations implemented are:

1. For strip searches of menstruating women, issue further guidance that women should be allowed to remove and dispose of external sanitary towels themselves and that a fresh towel should be provided.
2. Issue guidance to staff to allow pregnant, disabled, or elderly prisoners to sit down for as much of the search as possible providing that this does not reduce the thoroughness and effectiveness of the search.
3. Post operative and bedridden prisoners and those who are in severe pain or have recently given birth should be strip searched only in exceptional circumstances. When it is necessary to carry out such a strip search, the procedure should be modified on an ad hoc basis to allow the least discomfort or intrusion. Searches should not be carried out if the healthcare professionals advise that it is clinically unacceptable.
4. Issue guidance making it clear that gender is not a Genuine Occupational Qualification for cell searching, and explaining how to involve opposite sex searchers.
5. Ensure managers set and communicate realistic targets for rub down searches, as part of the local searching strategy, particularly during periods of high movement.
6. Guidance should be issued on when a prisoner may be in the "sight" of a person of the opposite sex, for the purposes of Prison Rule 41(3) by way of amendment to the Security Manual.

Implementation has begun on the following recommendations:

1. Commission research to identify whether, and if so what, changes can be made in procedures for strip searching to improve its effectiveness. The research should consider: the views of staff; their approach and demeanour while conducting strip searches; prisoners' perceptions; and the gender, age and culture background of those searched.

A draft Business Case has been prepared which is awaiting approval.

2. Introduce procedures to ensure that new receptions understand they will be strip searched, and what is involved in the search.

The Prison Service Order on reception arrangements is being revised. When it is published, it will include further guidance on searching arrangements.

3. Set aside resources within the research programme to evaluate existing and emerging technology to replace routine strip searching when reliable and affordable equipment is available.

The Police Scientific Development Branch (PSDB) undertake this type of research for Security Group. This work forms part of the research programme.

4. Ensure that statistical recording and monitoring of strip searches will be provided for in the future information and communication technologies introduced throughout the Service.

This will be considered when the Prison Service prisoner database is upgraded.

5. When Prison Officer Initial Training (POINT) course is revised, include in the module for those working with under 18s material that will ensure they are aware of ways in which searching, and the way they conduct searches, may affect young people.

POINT is being revised, and will be trialled. The additional considerations for searching under 18s will be included in the revised training.

6. Young offender institutions (YOIs) that will continue to hold juveniles must revisit their searching strategies and make specific provision for their under 18 units. Governors of prisons that are being re-roled to take only under 18s need to consider their whole searching strategy de novo to ensure that it is suitable for the establishment's new role.

Searching strategies are agreed between governors and their Area Manager, and will be amended to comply with this requirement. The appropriate section of the Security Manual and the security standard now need to be amended, so that governors will be audited against this requirement.

7. Issue central guidance for prisons on how to react when a dog indicates the possible presence of drugs on a visitor.

A research project conducted by Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) reported recently. One of its recommendations was that further guidance was needed in the light of its findings, and this work will be taken forward.

The three recommendations on which progress has yet to commence are:

1. Consider introducing the sideways stance for rub down searching of violent prisoners.
2. Cease the practice of randomly rub down searching official and professional visitors to category C and D prisons and to most women's prisons and YOIs.
3. For legal representatives, draw a distinction between, on the one hand, barristers and those counted as solicitors for the purposes of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE), and on the other hand, those practising as legal advisers but not counted as solicitors for the purposes of PACE. The latter should continue to be rub down searched as though they were domestic visitors.

These recommendations will be picked up shortly as the Security Manual chapters on searching are reviewed.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

National Training Organisations

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment pursuant to his answer of 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 125W, for what reason the list of 1,140 organisations and 570 postcodes placed in the Library differs from the total of 2,330 organisations to which the consultation paper was sent; and if he will place the full list of the 2,330 organisations in the Library. [160060]

Mr. Wicks: The discrepancies in the list placed in the Library on 3 April were due to a clerical error. I apologise for the inconvenience caused by this. A full list has now been placed in the Library. I have asked officials to ensure that a full list is also sent to the hon. Member.

Departmental Advertising

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what major advertising campaigns his Department is carrying out; and what the cost and duration of each is. [154263]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 19 March 2001]:* No advertising campaigns are currently being run by the Department. The Teacher Training Agency is continuing its campaign to recruit teachers.

Medical Students

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what changes in recruitment policy to medical schools there have been in the last five years, with particular reference to *(a)* gender, *(b)* ethnicity and *(c)* social class; [158442]

(2) what his policy is for medical student recruitment in the new medical schools in relation to *(a)* gender, *(b)* ethnicity and *(c)* social class. [158443]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The number of places at medical schools is set by the Government. However, higher education institutions are responsible for their own recruitment and admissions procedures, which should be transparent and based on published criteria so that selection is on the basis of an applicant's ability and potential.

The number of medical school places was increased by 1,100 in 2000 and by a further 1,000 earlier this year. In both cases, when medical schools bid for extra places they were asked to demonstrate an active commitment to the recruitment of students from a broad range of social and ethnic backgrounds, to reflect the patterns of the population that they serve.

Curriculum 2000

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many extra full-time equivalent teachers are required to deliver Curriculum 2000. [158876]

Mr. Wicks: There is no evidence at this stage to suggest we need more teachers to deliver Curriculum 2000.

Departmental Report

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide a breakdown on the components of expenditure accounted for under the heading, 'Giving everyone the chance, through education, training and work, to realise their full potential and thus build an inclusive and fair society', referred to on page 146 of his Departmental Report 2001–02 to 2003–04 (Cm 5102) on *(a)* administration £277,086,000, *(b)* other current £783,836,000, *(c)* grants £17,732,205,000 and *(d)* capital £2,066,284,000. [159004]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* A breakdown of the amounts under 'administration', 'other current', 'grants' and 'capital' in Request for Resource 1 (RfR1) of the Main Estimate on page 146 of the Departmental Report is given in the table. It is based on Note 9 to the Estimates on page 160 of the Departmental Report.

Function breakdown of expenditure in RfR 1

£ million

Estimate section	*Admin*	*Other current*	*Grants*	*Capital*
A				
Voluntary aided school loans	—	—	—	1
Assisted Places Scheme	—	—	70	—
Music and Ballet Scheme	—	—	12	—
City Technology Colleges	—	—	67	—
IT in schools, National Grid for Learning, etc.	—	10	16	—
Qualifications (other than through the QCA)	—	—	35	—
Under Fives	—	—	31	—
Modernising the teaching profession (other than through the TTA)	—	—	583	—
International Services	—	—	20	—
Child care Initiatives	—	162	—	—
Education Action Zones	—	—	60	—
Fresh Start	—	—	20	—
Key Stage 1 and 2 central costs	—	—	13	—
Other miscellaneous programmes	—	—	60	—
Subtotal	—	172	987	1
B				
Higher education initiatives (other than through HEFCE)	—	—	12	—
Adult Education	—	10	111	—
Access Funds	—	—	96	—
Further Education initiatives (including payments to the Home Office for prison education)	—	—	76	—
British Academy	—	—	36	—
Careers advice (other than through Connexions)	—	11	—	—
Connexions (current expenditure)	—	321	—	—
ILO subscription	—	—	7	—
Learning Partnership Fund	—	—	10	—
Career Development Initiatives (including ILAs)	—	47	34	—
Neighbourhood Support	—	—	20	—
University for Industry	—	60	—	—
Millennium Volunteers	—	—	15	—
Other miscellaneous programmes	—	41	18	—
Subtotal	—	489	436	—
C				
Student Loans	—	—	818	—
Mandatory awards (through the SLC)	—	—	560	—
Other miscellaneous programmes	—	—	1	—
Subtotal	—	—	1,379	—
D				
ESF payments	—	—	258	—
ESF receipts	—	—	–258	—
E				
ESF payments	—	—	80	—
F				
Work-based Learning for adults	—	19	—	—
Employment Zones	—	54	—	—
Other miscellaneous programmes	—	11	—	—
Subtotal	—	84	—	—
G				
Salary costs	157	1	—	—
Other administration costs	110	5	—	—
Capital Charges and depreciation on the civil estate	4	—	—	10
Publicity and research	—	27	—	—
Other miscellaneous programmes	—	—	1	—
Subtotal	270	33	1	—
H				
Compensation to former college of education staff	—	—	11	—
I				
Payments to local authorities for schools programmes	—	—	2,267	—

Function breakdown of expenditure in RfR 1

£ million

Estimate section	*Admin*	*Other current*	*Grants*	*Capital*
J				
Mandatory Awards (through LAs)	—	—	122	—
K				
ESF payments to local authorities	—	—	30	—
ESF receipts	—	—	–30	—
L				
ESF payments to local authorities	—	—	20	—
M				
EMAs and student support (through LAs)	—	—	163	—
N				
New Deal: salaries	[1]—	—	—	—
New Deal: other Expenditure	—	6	—	—
Subtotal	[1]—	6	—	—
O				
Capital charges and depreciation on non-civil estate assets	7	—	—	—
P				
Interest repayments on loans to VA schools	—	—	—	—
Q				
Capital grants:				
VA and former GM schools	—	—	212	—
Class size reductions	—	—	70	—
Specialist schools	—	—	13	—
New Deal for Schools	—	—	293	—
Other schools capital (inc. that paid through the Standards Fund)	—	—	821	—
Grants in aid:				
Education Transfer Council	—	—	7	—
BECTA	—	—	5	—
QCA	—	—	54	—
Teacher Training Agency	—	—	392	—
Subtotal	—	—	1,867	—
R				
Student loans payments	—	—	—	2,056
Capital grants:				
Connexions	—	—	15	—
Grants in aid:				
HEFCE	—	—	4,677	—
Student Loans Company	—	—	31	—
IiP UK Ltd.	—	—	2	—
Learning and Skills Council	—	—	5,476	—
General Teaching Council	—	—	7	—
Adult Learning Inspectorate	—	—	20	—
Subtotal	—	—	10,228	2,056
S				
Grants in aid:				
Equal Opportunities Commission	—	—	9	—
Disability Rights Commission	—	—	11	—
Subtotal	—	—	20	—
T				
Capital Modernisation Fund grants (not paid through the Standards Fund)	—	—	153	—
U				
ESF appropriations in aid	—	—	—	—
Request for Resources Total	277	784	17,732	2,066

[1] Amounts below £500,000

Note:

Figures in the table have been rounded and do not therefore sum to the totals in all cases

Helplines

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159509]

Mr. Wills: The Department administers the following helplines which provide advice and information to the public:

	Helpline number
Career Development Loans	0800 585 505
Childcare Link	0800 096 0296
Computers for Teachers	0870 241 4679
Individual Learning Accounts	0800 072 5678
Millennium Volunteers	0800 917 8185
New Deal Helpline	0845 606 2626
Work-Life Balance	020 7273 5626

In addition to these directly administered helplines, the Department regularly works with outside partners during the year to set up, or provide temporary support for, helplines on specific topics. Those planned in the near future are:

Travel Essentials (8–11 May): helpline supporting Radio 1 offering information and advice on finding work, training or education at home or abroad;

Adult Learners Week (14–18 May): annual helpline, linked to Learn Direct (administered by UfI) for those wishing to take up or return to learning;

Student Essentials Exams (21–23 May): helpline supporting Radio 1 offering information and advice to students with last minute worries regarding their GCSE\A Level exams.

The Department's Public Enquiry Line (0870 000 2288) is the official contact point for members of the general public on all areas of DfEE activities.

The Department does not centrally hold information about helplines run by its agencies.

Departmental Policies (Mitcham and Morden)

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Mitcham and Morden constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [159511]

Mr. Wills: Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on Mitcham and Morden constituency and Merton LEA.

Beacon Schools

Wimbledon Chase[1]

Type—Middle

Start—September 1999

[1] School is spreading good practice in raising achievement in KS 2, pupil behaviour, monitoring and assessment, classroom management and support for NQTs.

Connexions Partnership

Merton as part of the London South area is one of the 12 areas where the Connexions Partnership began to deliver the service from 1 April 2001. The London South area has been allocated a provisional budget allocation of £9,408,621 and covers the boroughs of Merton, Kingston Upon Thames, Sutton, Croydon and Bromley.

Infant Class Sizes

Progress in implementing plan:

As at January 2001, Merton LEA had no infants in classes of more than 30. The figure in January 2000 was 1,470 (30.8 per cent.).

The authority has been allocated £2.4 million in capital funding and £1.7 million in revenue funding between 1999–2000 and 2001–02.

Performance Data (England averages include independent schools)

Key stage 2: pupils achieving level 4 and above

Percentage

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
English				
LEA	75	69	66	58
England	75	71	65	63
Maths				
LEA	69	68	53	55
England	72	69	59	62
Science				
LEA	85	78	68	62
England	85	78	69	69

GCSE and GNVQ results

Percentage

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
5+ A-C*				
LEA average	40.5	38.8	37.3	37.5
England average	49.2	47.9	46.3	45.1
5+ A-G*				
LEA average	85.8	86.3	84.8	82.9
England average	88.9	88.5	87.5	86.4
No passes				
LEA average	7.4	8.1	7.7	9.8
National average	5.6	6.0	6.6	7.7

GCE A/AS examinations and Advanced GNVQs

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
Average points for two or more A/AS levels				
LEA average	15.0	14.6	13.2	12.3
National average	17.3	18.2	17.8	17.3
A/AS average per entry				
LEA average	4.9	4.7	4.4	4.6
National average	5.5	5.5	5.4	5.3
Advanced GNVQ point score				
LEA average	9.7	9.2	11.4	n/a
National average	10.1	9.9	9.6	n/a

LEA capital funding

	2001–02	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98* £000
ACG	2,829	357	289	139	47
SCA	750	48	177	53	24
NDS	—	2,074	1,217	1,287	360
VA Grant	3,774	187	138	104	105
Seed	131	121	—	—	—
Devolved Formula Capital	—	531	—	—	—
Additional Devolved Formula Capital	—	463	—	—	—
NGfL	669	478	326	294	—
Science Labs	103	103	—	—	—
Access at 85 per cent.	232	96	—	—	11
Security	33	47	47	45	36
Class size	—	1,351	1,076	—	—
Outside toilets	—	—	—	23	—
Energy Efficiency	—	—	—	42	—
Assistance with AMP	—	—	21	—	—
Nursery Provision	—	—	—	—	—
NDS Condition Funding	404	—	—	—	—
NDS Devolved formula	802	—	—	—	—
SLSU	28	32	—	—	—
PFI Credits	20,700	—	—	—	—
Total	30,455	5,888	3,291	1,987	583

Funding per pupil

In Merton LEA, funding per pupil has increased by £600 in real terms between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

A PFI project to reorganise its secondary schools as part of a wider reorganisation was approved by the Project Review Group in July 2000 and is currently working towards contract signature.

Further Education

Student numbers at all FEFC funded institutions where home postcode is in the local authority district of Merton.

1996–97 to 1999–2000

	FEFC funded				*Non-FEFC funded*			
	16–18		*Adult*		*16–18*		*Adult*	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1996–97	1,812	330	920	6,530	23	95	126	355
1997–98	1,812	369	858	6,978	23	102	134	619
1998–99	1,833	333	827	6,832	50	116	193	644
1999–2000	1,857	365	809	5,925	60	171	159	946

Modern Apprenticeships

Information on Modern Apprenticeships for all English constituencies was placed in the Library of the House of Commons on 30 March 2001.

New Deal for Young People

In the Mitcham and Morden constituency, 988 young people have joined the New Deal to end January 2001. 461 have found jobs, 361 of which are sustained.

Labour Market Statistics

The working age employment rate in Merton in winter 2000–01 was 73.9 per cent., below the UK rate of 74.5 per cent. The rate in winter 1996–97 was 74.6 per cent., in winter 1997–98 78.3 per cent., in winter 1998–99 81.1 per cent., and in winter 1999–2000 77.1 per cent. These figures are volatile at this level, and our best interpretation of the trend in the employment rate for Merton since 1997 is that it has been broadly flat.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 13.8 per cent. in March 1997 to 6.3 per cent. in March 2001 in the Mitcham and Morden constituency.

Teaching Methods

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will take steps to integrate the methods of teaching in secondary education with those in higher education. [159799]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government recognise that there are significant differences between secondary and higher education and that the approaches to teaching in the two sectors should reflect this. However, we also believe that there are significant opportunities for the sectors to interact with and learn from each other.

The recent Green Paper "Schools: Building on Success" makes proposals which will strengthen the links between the university and school sectors to the advantage of both. These include the idea of joint appointments of teachers to the staff of both a university and a school. The Green Paper also sets out the Government's intention to pilot a university fellowship scheme to allow school teachers with real expertise in their subject to take a secondment to a university, in order to research their subject and perhaps embark on a higher degree. These proposals both recognise the differences between the sectors and the opportunity for each to learn from the other.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160029]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Since 3 May 1997, no more than three full-time equivalent special advisers have been in post at any one time.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160045]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report,* column 607W.

Class Sizes

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average class size was for each year of secondary school in the north-west in each of the years from 1997 to date. [160080]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available data are shown in the table.

Average class sizes: Classes taught by one teacher

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[1]
Classes mainly under 14	24.5	246	24.7	24.7	[3]—
Classes mainly 14 and 15	21.2	213	21.2	21.4	[3]—
Classes mainly 16+	10.4	105	10.3	10.6	[3]—
Year group 7 and below[2]	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	24.9
Year group 8[2]	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	25
Year group 9[2]	[3]—	—	[3]—	[3]—	24.4
Year group 10[2]	[3]—	—	[3]—	[3]—	21.6
Year group 11[2]	[3]—	—	[3]—	[3]—	21.1
Year group 12[2]	[3]—	—	[3]—	[3]—	11.6
Year group 13[2]	[3]—	—	[3]—	[3]—	9.4

[1] Provisional.

[2] Includes middle deemed secondary schools.

[3] Information by year group was collected for the first time in 2001 and only classes where a specific year group was given have been included, i.e. not mixed.

The size of the average secondary class nationally, at 22.0, is still five below the average primary class. In 2001–02 secondary headteachers will receive an average of £70,000 and primary headteachers £24,000 in direct grant to spend as they choose including on reducing class sizes if that is their priority.

The full-time equivalent number of regular secondary teachers in the north-west increased by 1,300 between January 1997 and January 2001.

In addition, the size of the average primary class in the north-west has gone down from 27.9 in January 1997 to 26.7 in January 2001. The corresponding figure for primary children in the Ribble Valley constituency is from 29.1 to 27.7.

Tuition Fees

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if it is his policy to ensure that student contributions towards tuition fees should rise in line with inflation. [159814]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The maximum level of student contributions to tuition fees for students at publicly funded institutions is uprated each year to take account of inflation. In the next academic year it will be £1,075. How much students actually pay depends on an assessment of their income. Currently, over 40 per cent. of students make no contribution to their tuition fees and that figure will rise to around 50 per cent. from this September because we have raised the contribution thresholds above the level of inflation. We estimate that from September the average contribution made by students will be just £1,400 over the whole of a three-year course.

Work-life Balance Challenge Fund

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the local authorities that have applied for funding from the Work-life Balance Challenge Fund; and how many have been successful. [160301]

Ms Hodge: The following shows that 56 local authorities applied for the Challenge Fund, of which 25 have been successful[1]:

Bedford Borough Council[1]
Bedfordshire County Council
Bolton Metropolitan Council (Housing Department)[1]
Braintree District Council[1]
Bristol City Council, The Equalities Unit[1]
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council[1]
Cambridgeshire County Council
Chelmsford Borough Council
Cheshire County Council
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Congleton Borough Council
Coventry City Council
Devon County Council[1]
Dorset County Council
Forest of Dean District Council[1]
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council[1]
Hertfordshire County Council[1]
Kent County Council
Kingston Upon Hull City Council[1]
Leicester County Council, Education Department[1]
London Borough of Camden[1]
London Borough of Croydon
London Borough of Enfield
London Borough of Merton[1]
Medway Council[1]
Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Norfolk County Council[1]
North Lincolnshire Council
Nottingham City Council[1]
Peak District National Authority[1]
Perth and Kinross Council[1]
Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Education Department[1]

Redditch Borough Council

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council[1]

Rutland County Council

Salford City Council

Sefton Education Department[1]

Sheffield City Council

Shropshire Social Services Directorate[1]

Slough Borough Council

Somerset County Council

South Gloucestershire Council, Education Service

St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council

Staffordshire County Council

Stockton-on-Tees Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership[1]

Stoke-on-Trent Social Services Department

Stratford-on-Avon District Council

Surrey Social Services[1]

The London Borough of Hounslow

The London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames

Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Warrington Borough Council

West Berkshire Council

West Dunbartonshire Council

West Lancashire District Council[1].

[1] Successful

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many applications there have been for funding from the Work-life Balance Challenge Fund; and how many have been successful, broken down by private, public and voluntary organisations. [160302]

Ms Hodge: We received 180 applications for the Work-life Balance Challenge Fund for the year 2000–01, of which 116 were from the public sector, 43 from the private sector and 21 from the voluntary sector. We have been able to support 88 projects, of which 49 are from the public sector, 34 from the private sector and six from the voluntary sector. Currently we are inviting applications for this year's (2001–02) Challenge Fund.

Jobseekers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many jobseekers have been provided with mobile phones to help them find work. [160202]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Employment Zones aim to provide new and innovative solutions to help people back into work in 15 areas of persistently high unemployment. 1126 mobile phones have been issued to participants; 3 per cent. of the 35,000 total clients. Action Teams for Jobs are targeting the barriers preventing jobless people getting and keeping work in 40 areas in Great Britain. 63 of 17257 participants (0.35 per cent.) in Action Teams have had mobile phones issued where there was a clear jobsearch benefit to the individual.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many jobseekers have been given financial help to *(a)* buy a car *(b)* buy a motorcycle and *(c)* take driving lessons, by the employment hit squads announced in June 2000. [160221]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The 40 Action Teams for Jobs in deprived areas are targeting the barriers preventing jobless people getting and keeping work. Over 5,000 people have been helped into work so far. Financial assistance has been provided to buy 28 vehicles and 382 driving lessons, mainly in rural areas where vacancies are a distance away from people's homes or suitable transport is required for self-employment purposes or as an incentive to encourage people to take up jobs which would normally not be accessible to them.

ES Job Bank

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many vacancies are on the ES Job Bank; and how many people access the learning and work website each day. [160217]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mark Neale to Mr. David Willetts, dated 8 May 2001:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked Leigh Lewis to reply to your question about the ES Job Bank and Learning and Work Bank website. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to Mr Lewis as Chief Executive of the Agency. I am replying on Mr Lewis' behalf.

In answer to your specific question, on 1 May 2001, there were 405,348 jobs on the ES Job Bank. The usage of the Learning and Work Bank website (www.worktrain.gov.uk) has been growing since its launch on 8 March. In the last week of April, 41,636 visitor sessions were recorded on the site; the busiest day being Wednesday 26 April with 7,269 visits to the site.

I hope this is helpful.

Youth Cards

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made on the introduction of youth cards. [159816]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Following an extensive procurement exercise conducted under the European Union Procurement Directive's Negotiated Procedure, the Government have selected CAPITA as their preferred bidder to develop and deliver the Connexions Card.

The Connexions Card is an exciting and innovative development, which will provide a powerful incentive to young people to stay in learning.

The Connexions Card will be rolled out initially in one region from autumn of this year and then progressively so that it will be available across England from autumn 2002.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if residential homes are entitled to a free television licence for televisions that are watched both by residents over the age of 75 years and other people. [155412]

Janet Anderson: The Government have received a number of representations from hon. Members and members of the public on this subject. We are continuing to consider the matter.

Departmental Policies (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency, the effect on Shrewsbury and Atcham of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158433]

Mr. Chris Smith: Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on my hon. Friend's constituency which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published strategies to take this forward including "Tomorrows Tourism" and "A Sporting Future for All", which was recently followed up by "The Government's Plan for Sport". We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report Building on PAT10.

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding, the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one-in-four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over-60's and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone by December 2001. We have commissioned a taskforce which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health, education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper on "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high-quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make cultural and sporting activities inclusive ones, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

Shrewsbury and Atcham

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 157 national lottery awards to Shrewsbury and Atcham since May 1997, totalling £10,155,404. This includes an award from the Millennium Festival of £30,000.

Thirty-four Millennium Award Winners have been identified from Shrewsbury and Atcham and between them they have received grants totalling £89,185.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 6,500 people aged 75 or over living in the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency.

Shropshire Library Authority, which covers the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency, received awards from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund of £99,494 in 1997–98, £85,932 and, as a member of a consortium of authorities, £324,439 in 1999–2000, and £23,775 in 2000–01. All the awards were for public library ICT projects, except for the 2000–01 award which was for a reader development project with the county's homeless community. It is not possible to say what proportion of the overall funding benefited the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency, but the 1997–98 award was for a project wholly based in Shrewsbury library.

School Sport Co-ordinators will be based in families of schools, in areas of greatest need, linked wherever possible through local education authorities to Specialist Sports Colleges. They will provide opportunities for young people to compete regularly for their school and take part in a wide range of sports. By 2004, there will be about 250 families established with 1,000 secondary schools and up to 6,000 primary schools benefiting directly from this programme. There is one school sport co-ordinator in Shrewsbury and Atcham attached to Wolverhampton MBC.

English Heritage have awarded the following grants:

Churches

All Saints', Berrington—offered £17,514, paid £11,794

St. Michael and All Angels', Pitchford—offered £155,652, paid £137,724

St. Mary's, Westbury—offered £74,700, paid £3,291

St. Alkmund's, Shrewsbury—offered £3,910, nothing paid to date

Abbey Church of the Holy Cross, Shrewsbury—offered £66,708, paid £12,754

Holy Trinity, Minsterley—offered £20,071, paid £12,643

Other Listed Buildings

Old Market Hall, Shrewsbury—offered £149,382, nothing paid to date

Loton Hall, Alberbury—offered £49,659, paid £37,007

Hargreaves Farmhouse, Wollaston—offered £68,000, nothing paid to date

Attingham Park, Attingham (roof repairs)—offered £24,264, paid £21,838

Attingham Park, Attingham (railings)—offered £22,250, nothing paid to date

Ditherington Flax Mill, Shrewsbury—offered £500,000, nothing paid to date

Conservation Officer—offered £22,369, paid £14,906

Conservation Area Partnership Schemes Shrewsbury—1997–98 £65,000

Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes Shrewsbury: West End and Northern Gateway—2000–01 £83,700, 2001–02 £83,700

Wyle Cop, Frankwell and The Square—2001–02 £55,000.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the region which may have an effect on the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency. These include the receipt by the West Midlands Arts Board of £10,378,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £11,361,686 or by 9.5 per cent.

Departmental Policies (Battersea)

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Battersea constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158762]

Mr. Chris Smith: Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on my hon. Friend's constituency which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published strategies to take this forward including "Tomorrows Tourism" and "A Sporting Future for All", which was recently followed up by "The Government's Plan for Sport". We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report Building on PAT10.

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding, the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and Lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one-in-four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over 60's and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a taskforce which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the Lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health, education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper on "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through its commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high-quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make cultural and sporting activities inclusive ones, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

Battersea

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 92 national lottery awards to Battersea, totalling £13,579,536. This includes two awards from the Millennium Festival totalling £60,000.

Twenty-four Millennium Award Winners have been identified from Battersea and between them they have received grants totalling £69,821.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 4,900 people aged 75 or over living in the Battersea constituency.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the region which may have an effect on the Battersea constituency. These are:

> London Arts received £26,765,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £29,886,048 or by 11.66 per cent.
>
> From 1 April 1999 Battersea residents under 16 were able to benefit from free admission to the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Imperial War Museum, HMS Belfast, the Cabinet War Rooms, the National Maritime Museum and the Museum of London. From 1 April 2000, Battersea residents over 60 were able to gain free admission to most of the above. Subject to the agreement of their Trustees, we expect very nearly all of the currently charging DCMS sponsored museums in London to introduce universal free admission from 1 December 2001.

Broadcasting Act

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Broadcasting Act 1996 is in conformity with the European Convention on Human Rights. [159274]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The courts decide whether legislative provisions are compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. No declaration of incompatibility has been made in the domestic courts under the Human Rights Act 1998 as regards any provision of the Broadcasting Act 1996; nor has there been any finding of incompatibility in respect of that legislation by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. A statement about compatibility with Convention rights of the provisions of new broadcasting legislation will of course be made by Ministers, as required by the Human Rights Act 1998.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people from the north-west visited the dome. [160098]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has advised that exit polls of dome visitors conducted by MORI in January, April and August 2000 found that 4 per cent. of visitors to the dome, or around 260,000 people, came from the north-west.

Additionally, NMEC's records show that bookings made by the North West Education Region, covering a similar area to the postcode area, under the free schools initiative totalled 20,226 or 3 per cent. of such bookings in the UK. The same Education Region also made 8,500 bookings (or 2 per cent. of such bookings in the UK) under the special offer available to schools for paid visits.

Entertainment Budgets

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the entertainment budget was for his Department in the years from 1997 to date. [160096]

Mr. Chris Smith: The table shows expenditure by my Department on hospitality. The figures exclude the Department's Agencies and NDPBs.

Year	£
1996–97	41,000
1997–98	17,230
1998–99	28,688
1999–2000	32,533
2000–01	50,891
2001–02[1]	3,334

[1] Spend to date

Regional Tourist Boards

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had on the provision of additional funding for the marketing function of regional tourist boards. [160128]

Janet Anderson: The Department and the English Tourism Council (ETC) have had frequent discussions about additional funding for the Regional Tourist Boards (RTBs). The ETC have recently received £3.8 million in additional funding for an advertising and promotion campaign, as part of the recovery plan following the foot and mouth outbreak. More than half of this funding is being passed to RTBs for public relations and marketing work. The Department has also been involved in discussions with DETR on the use of additional funds being provided to Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) as a response to the impact of foot and mouth disease, some of which the RDAs may choose to use to support promotional activities by the RTBs.

Tourism (Loans)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the provision of an interest free loan scheme to tourism businesses. [160129]

Janet Anderson: As a member of the Rural Task Force, my Department has fed in suggestions on what help can be given to tourism businesses affected by foot and mouth, including loan schemes. A package of financial measures to help affected businesses was announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, and Chairman of the Rural Task Force, on 20 March. In addition, on 6 April the Department of Trade and Industry announced that tourist and retail businesses suffering cash-flow problems will now be able to apply for loans of up to £250,000 under the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme with much greater flexibility over their repayments.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions he has had with Wembley National Stadium Ltd. about the Government becoming a stakeholder in it; and if he will make a statement. [160280]

Mr. Chris Smith: I have had a number of recent discussions with the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. about the Wembley Stadium project. I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made to the House on 2 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 851–61.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a progress report on proposals for the redevelopment of Wembley Stadium. [160393]

Mr. Chris Smith: I refer the hon. Member to my statement to the House on 2 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 851–61.

Tourism Promotion

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the terms of the agreement are between the British Tourist Authority and the Premier League on promoting tourism. [160273]

Janet Anderson: The Premier League, concerned about the impact of foot and mouth disease on Britain's tourism industry, recently approached the British Tourist Authority with an offer to use the worldwide television coverage of its competition to help promote Britain to potential visitors from overseas. The exact details of the agreement are still under discussion between the BTA and the Premier League, but I understand that, among its provisions, BTA advertisements will appear on the perimeters of pitches in the 178 countries where Premiership games are screened.

BBC Fair Trading Policies

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will publish the outcome of the review of the BBC's fair trading policies; and if he will make a statement. [160693]

Mr. Chris Smith: Further to my written answer of 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 696W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas) about an independent review of the BBC Commercial Policy Guidelines and Fair Trading Commitment by Richard Whish, Professor of Law at King's College, I am today publishing, jointly with the BBC, the findings of that review. Professor Whish has concluded from his scrutiny of the documentation that:

> "the BBC's Fair Trading Commitment and the Guidelines are appropriate to ensure that the BBC does not distort competition in commercial markets."

Sir Christopher Bland has written to me on behalf of the BBC Governors to acknowledge the report's findings and to inform me that when the Guidelines are next reviewed they will take into account Professor Whish's suggested clarifications to the existing format.

He has also informed me that the BBC has been awarded the British Standards Institute's ISO 9001:2000 accreditation for its fair trading compliance procedures.

I am arranging for copies of Professor Whish's report to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Working Group on Human Remains

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will announce the membership and terms of reference of the Working Group on Human Remains. [160694]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I am delighted to do so. The main tasks of the Working Group on Human Remains will be to examine the current legal status of human remains within the publicly funded Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom, to consider the desirability of a statement of principles (and supporting guidance) relating to the care and safekeeping of human remains and to the handling of requests for return, and to prepare a report for the Government.

The Membership of the Group will be:

Chairman: Professor Normal Palmer, Professor of Commercial Law, University College, London

Mr. Tristram Besterman—Director, Manchester University Museum, Convener, Museums Association Ethics Committee

Dr. Neil Chalmers—Director, The Natural History Museum

Dr. Maurice Davies—Deputy Director, Museums Association

Professor Caroline Forder—Professor of European Family Law, University of Maastricht

Mrs. Hetty Gleave—Solicitor, Hunters, Chair ArtResolve

Dr. Sally MacDonald—Manager, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London

Dr. John Mack—Senior Keeper, British Museum

Professor Sir Peter Morris—Nuffield Professor of Surgery at the University of Oxford and President-elect of the Royal College of Surgeons of England

Dr. Laura Peers—Lecturer in Ethnology and Curator of Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Professor Marilyn Strathern—Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge.

The terms of reference for the Group are set out. The Government intend that the group should start work as soon as possible.

Terms of reference for Working Group on the Potential Return of Human Remains

To examine the current legal status of human remains within the collections of publicly funded Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom.

To examine the powers of museums and galleries governed by statute to deaccession, or otherwise release from their possession, human remains within their collections and to consider the desirability and possible form of legislative change in this area.

To consider the circumstances in which material other than, but associated with, human remains might be properly included within any proposed legislative change in respect of human remains.

To take advice from interested parties as necessary.

Consider the desirability of a Statement of Principles (and supporting guidance) relating to the care and safekeeping of human remains and to the handling of requests for return. If the Panel considers appropriate, to draw up the terms of such a Statement and guidance.

To prepare a report for the Minister for the Arts and make recommendations as to proposals which might form the basis for a consultation document (to be used for consultation under the Regulatory Reform Bill).

CABINET OFFICE

Helplines

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by her Department and its agencies. [159500]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Cabinet Office has responsibility for the following telephone helplines:

1. An order line for reports from the Committee on Standards in Public Life.
2. An order line for printed Civil Service career information.
3. A delegate helpline for the "Women Unlimited" event run by the Women's Unit.
4. An order line for reports published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO).
5. An inquiry line for Civil Service pensioners.
6. Helplines for the public on foot and mouth disease and fuel availability.

COI Communications, which reports to the Minister for the Cabinet Office, includes telephone inquiry service management within its wider remit as the procurer of publicity services for Government. Overall authority for such services rests with the commissioning Department.

Ethnic Minority Monitoring

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has to issue new guidance with respect to the inclusion of an Irish in Britain category in ethnic minority origin categories for monitoring purposes. [160323]

Mr. Stringer: For the purposes of monitoring the origin of employees in the Civil Service, the Cabinet Office has issued guidance to Departments and agencies that reflects the ethnicity categories in the Census 2001, including an Irish category.

The Office for National Statistics has published an interim standard classification of ethnic groups for Government statistics more generally. This also includes an Irish category.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160024]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160042]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Since 3 May 1997, a total of five special advisers have worked in the Ministry, two when my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) was Minister of Agriculture, and three since my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown) has been Minister. No more than two special advisers have been in post at any one time.

GM Communications Unit

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when the GM communications unit was formed; [144347]

(2) if he will make a statement on the GM communications unit. [144264]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 8 January 2001]:* The GM communications unit in the Cabinet Office was set up in July 1999 to co-ordinate across government on GM issues and provide a one-stop shop for journalists. The Cabinet Office continues to play a co-ordinating role in GM policy.

French Beef

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of advice issued by the Food Standards Agency to British consumers concerning French beef. [144317]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 8 January 2001]:* The Government have accepted it.

Departmental Business (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits abroad have been made by him and his Ministers on departmental business *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the last 12 months. [149141]

Mr. Nick Brown: For overseas visits from 2 May 1997 to 31 March 1999, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the list published on 17 June 1999, *Official Report*, column 196W; for overseas visits for the period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000, I refer him to the list published on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 969W. In the past 12 months, my Ministers and I have made 36 visits abroad.

Tobacco Farming

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times the Agriculture Council has discussed CAP subsidies for tobacco farming since May 1997. [153227]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Agriculture Council discussed the EU tobacco regime, including subsidies for tobacco growing, three times in 1998 and adopted a number of changes to the regime. The tobacco regime has also been raised on a number of other occasions since May 1997 during discussions on other regimes and CAP reform.

Departmental Policies (Truro and St. Austell)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Truro and St. Austell constituency, the effects on Truro and St. Austell of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154531]

Ms Quin: MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 annual agricultural and horticultural census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census has been placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU common agricultural policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

Average subsidies received by full-time farm businesses, England 1999–2000

£000

		Of which:			
	Total direct subsidies	*Crop subsidies*	*Livestock subsidies*	*Agri-environment*	*Other*[1]
Cereals	37.8	34.2	2.3	1.0	0.1
General cropping	31.8	28.8	2.4	0.6	0.0
Horticulture	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.2
Pigs and poultry	3.6	2.2	1.4	0.1	0.0
Dairy	8.5	2.8	4.9	0.8	0.0
LFA cattle and sheep	29.3	0.4	25.4	3.3	0.2
Lowland cattle and sheep	14.1	1.7	10.6	1.8	0.0
Mixed	33.8	21.4	10.7	1.7	0.0
All types	22.5	14.8	6.4	1.2	0.1

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

Notes:

1. HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies.
2. The figures show direct subsidy payments: they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under the CAP.

Source:

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short-term financial relief since 2 May 1997. This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation, worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer; £3,200 per average dairy farmer; £1,400 per average sheep farmer; and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the beef special premium scheme and suckler cow premium scheme respectively.

Since May 1997, the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by countryside stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full-time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the hill farm allowance scheme this year. This compares to £4,048 under the hill livestock compensatory allowance in 1996–97.

Truro and St. Austell also fall within an area with an objective 1 designation. This means that under the EU structural funds, the area is eligible for assistance to promote its development and structural adjustment. About £50 million of European funding over the next six years is available for rural development measures in Cornwall and the Scilly Isles. This money will attract an equal amount of national public spending as matched funding, the majority of which will be provided by this Department. Details of these measures, which include support for processing and marketing, farm diversification and training, are set out in the single programming document for Cornwall and the Scilly Isles. Farmers in Truro and St. Austell can also benefit from agri-environment schemes available under the England rural development programme.

Consumers in Truro and St. Austell will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

In relation to the Department's responsibility for fisheries policy, our key priority is to protect our fisheries resources for the future and we are taking firm action to ensure a viable future for the fishing industry. The last set of grant schemes, which ended in 1999, invested over £27 million in measures to help the fishing industry in England. Fishermen operating in the Truro and St. Austell constituency will now benefit from the £22.5 million aid package announced on 2 April to help restructure the English fishing industry, to improve the quality and value of the catch, and to retrain fishermen and rejuvenate fishing ports.

Sheep Exports

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions in the last five weeks, and on which dates, sheep unloaded into the lairage at the Port of Dover awaiting export were returned to their *(a)* farms of origin and *(b)* other United Kingdom destinations; and how many sheep have been returned from Dover in this way. [155083]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 March 2001]:* Three consignments of sheep, totalling 1,005 animals, awaiting export at premises in the Dover area were returned to their holdings of origin on 21 and 23 February 2001. One consignment of 416 sheep, awaiting export, was returned to a UK destination other than the holding of origin, on 23 February 2001.

Departmental Policies (Great Grimsby)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Great Grimsby constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [156243]

Ms Quin: MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU common agricultural policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Great Grimsby will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Great Grimsby. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the rural development regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England rural development programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 million in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for public goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

In relation to the Department's responsibility for fisheries policy, our key priority is to protect our fisheries resources for the future and we are taking firm action to ensure a viable future for the fishing industry. The last set of grant schemes, which ended in 1999, invested over £27 million in measures to help the fishing industry in England. Fishermen operating in the Great Grimsby constituency will now benefit from the £22.5 million aid package announced on 2 April, to help restructure the English fishing industry, and to improve the quality and value of the catch, and to retrain fishermen and rejuvenate fishing ports.

Sheep Shipments

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make available the communications, including notes of telephone conversations *(a)* between his Department centrally and regionally and the French authorities and *(b)* between Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth and his Department centrally and regionally since 1 November 2000 concerning animal shipments by Mr. Inizan from the UK to France; [156427]

(2) if he will make available the communications, including notes of telephone conversations in his Department's *(a)* possession and *(b)* control between Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth and the French authorities since 1 November 2000, concerning animal shipments by Mr. Inizan from the UK to France; [156426]

(3) if he will make available the communications between his Department and the French authorities since 1 November 2000 concerning compensation and indemnity for animals slaughtered in France originally emanating from Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth; [156424]

(4) if he will make available, in relation to animals slaughtered in France emanating originally from Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth, test results and allied papers in the *(a)* possession and *(b)* control of his Department's (i) centrally and (ii) regionally since 1 November 2000; [156428]

(5) under what certificates and permits Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth was allowed to export sheep from the UK to France after 1 September 2000; and if he will publish this documentation; [156430]

(6) if he will make available the communications between Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth and *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the French authorities since 1 November 2000 concerning compensation and indemnity for animals slaughtered in France originally emanating for Mr. Inizan; [156418]

(7) if he will make available the communications between Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth and his insurers copied *(a)* direct to his Department and *(b)* indirectly via the French authorities since 1 November 2000, concerning compensation and indemnity for animals slaughtered in France originally emanating from Mr. Inizan; [156425]

(8) which of his Department's centres were responsible for the sheep exported from the UK by Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth and subsequently slaughtered by the French authorities after 1 November 2000; [156429]

(9) if he will publish his Department's internal memoranda produced since 1 September 2000 concerning the shipments of sheep by Mr. Hugues Inizan of Plymouth from the UK to France on dates after 1 September 2000. [156431]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 30 March 2001]:* We have no record of communications with the French authorities specifically about Mr. Inizan's export of sheep prior to the confirmed outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK on 21 February. We are aware that Mr. Inizan exported a consignment of 402 sheep to France on 1 February 2001. The sheep were exported under an export health certificate which was certified on 31 January and which conformed to harmonised EU rules for such trade. The export health certificate was issued by the local animal health office in Llanishen, Cardiff.

The French authorities have now informed us that the seven samples that initially showed positive results have been re-tested with negative results. They have concluded that the initial serological positive reactions must be considered as false positives.

The Government cannot become involved in any contractual disputes between individual exporters and importers. However, the British Embassy in Paris has been actively pursuing the question of compensation, on behalf of British sheep exporters, for sheep slaughtered in France.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of sheep exported in the last year for which figures are available were exported to Greece; and what arrangements were put in place to ensure that the journey complied with the requirements of Directives 91/628 (as amended) and the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order. [157887]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* 4,350 sheep were certified for export to Greece from the UK in 2000. This represents 0.69 per cent. of the total number of sheep certified for export during 2000.

Directive 91/628, as amended, is implemented by the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, as amended. Consignments of animals to EU member states must be accompanied by a route plan and all route plans are subject to official scrutiny to ensure that the proposed journey complies with the statutory requirements for maximum journey times, rest, and feeding and watering intervals. The animals are inspected for health and fitness to travel before each journey starts. Additional monitoring of the condition of the animals and their transport is carried out at Dover port. Route plans must be returned within 15 days of the completion of the journey and details of the actual journey are then checked.

Foot and Mouth

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the risks of subsequent infection which arise from burial of animals carrying the foot and mouth virus and the precautions to be taken in order to minimise such risks in the event of burial being carried out. [156211]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* Before carcases are buried the Environment Agency undertakes a risk assessment of the geological, hydrogeological and hydrological conditions of the proposed location. This includes an assessment of risk to local groundwater and surface water potable supplies. Carcases are only buried where the risk assessment shows it is safe to do so, or where there can be adequate risk management applied.

After slaughter carcases are sprayed with an approved disinfectant which kills a large amount of the virus. Once rigor mortis sets in most of the virus carried inside the infected animals diminishes very quickly and veterinary advice is that there is very little risk of any remaining infection from buried animals spreading.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has collated to link the outbreak of foot and mouth *(a)* with Chinese restaurants or takeaways and *(b)* other restaurants and takeaways in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne; and if he will make a statement. [156655]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* We have no evidence to suggest that the foot and mouth outbreak originated from Chinese food or any other specific food source. Investigations are continuing in co-operation with trading standards but it is too soon to comment on detailed findings. The current outbreak is due to the type O, PanAsia strain virus. This strain is responsible for a number of outbreaks in different countries throughout the middle east, far east, and in Greece, Bulgaria and South Africa. One possibility is that the outbreak might have been caused by pigs eating untreated food originating from one of these countries. However, we will not be limiting our investigations to this particular line of inquiry.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent assessment he has made of the risks of infection as a consequence of burying infected carcases; and if he will list the scientific studies which he has taken into account. [156465]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* Foot and mouth disease is one of the most widely researched diseases and numerous scientific studies were taken into account when assessing the risks of infection resulting from burial of infected carcases.

Once rigor mortis sets in most of the virus carried inside the infected animal diminishes very quickly and veterinary advice is that there is little risk of any remaining infection from buried animals spreading.

Before carcases are buried the Environment Agency undertakes a risk assessment of the geological, hydrogeological and hydrological conditions of the proposed location. This includes an assessment of risk to local groundwater and surface water potable supplies.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will *(a)* relax the existing exclusion zones up to 30 miles around an infected area to enable animals situated therein to reach slaughterhouses; *(b)* make good the economic hardship incurred by those farmers caught in exclusion zones unable to move their animals; and *(c)* make fuller information available to those farmers caught in form D and exclusion zones, in particular by updates to the MAFF website and a local MAFF regional office helpline; and if he will make a statement. [156280]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* The boundaries surrounding an infected area may extend beyond the statutory minimum 10 km for disease control purposes and because, in order to simplify identification, they are determined by clear geographical boundaries. If outbreaks of foot and mouth are still being confirmed in an area the movement restrictions cannot be lifted or relaxed. The area may also be extended to take account of windborne spread, particularly from pig premises. The procedure for lifting infected area restrictions involves a process of checking that there are no infected animals in the area surrounding the infected premises. An infected area may only be lifted 30 days after the preliminary cleansing and disinfection. From 23 April movements of animals from infected areas, but not within 3 km of an infected place, to abattoirs in the same infected area for immediate slaughter for human consumption have been permitted. From 4 May movements of animals from within 3 km of an infected premises to abattoirs in the same infected area for slaughter for human consumption have been permitted provided 15 days have elapsed since preliminary cleansing and disinfection of any infected premises within 3 km of the premises.

Infected areas will be lifted as soon as possible and, for example, the declaratory orders relating to Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire and Kent have already been revoked.

When infected areas cannot be completely lifted, because of the number of disease cases, the Ministry will consider reducing the boundaries. Decisions to reduce boundaries are made on a case-by-case basis in discussion with vets, taking into account the number and proximity of any confirmed FMD cases. The northern infected area has been reduced on two occasions, firstly to exclude Ripon (on 2 April) and then to release part of the Yorkshire Dales (on 20 April).

Compensation is payable for the market value of animals slaughtered to control foot and mouth disease. It is not payable for the consequential losses, for example caused by movement restrictions. Farmers in infected areas, whose animals face welfare difficulties as a result of foot and mouth movement restrictions, may be eligible for the livestock welfare (disposal) scheme, operated by the Intervention Board on behalf of MAFF, under which they receive a slightly reduced rate of compensation for all animals slaughtered.

We recognise the importance of making information about such schemes and developments available to farmers and the Ministry's website http://www.maff.gov.uk/ relating to foot and mouth disease, which contains such information, is updated regularly. There is already a helpline operating (0845 0504141) and this is open from 8.00 am to 11.00 pm. Various contact details are also given on the website, and farmers may contact their regional service centre or trading standards for information on obtaining a licence to move animals.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the routing of lorries carrying *(a)* carcases and *(b)* fuel to Throckmorton airfield; and what discussions he has had with Worcestershire county council on this subject; [157064]

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications for traffic levels on local roads in the parish council areas of *(a)* Bishampton and Throckmorton, *(b)* Hill and Moor, *(c)* Wyre Piddle and *(d)* Pinvin of the decision to use Throckmorton airfield as a disposal site for carcases of culled animals. [156988]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 5 April 2001]:* The Ministry consulted Worcestershire county council concerning traffic implications of the scheme at Throckmorton airfield, in particular, the Worcestershire county council highways authority. There are planned routes into and out of the site for all transport vehicles, designed to minimise the impact on local residents. Vehicles transporting carcases are accompanied by escort vehicles, with instructions to follow the agreed planned routes.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his policy is for permitting a bull to enter a foot and mouth infected area for the purpose of inseminating milk-producing dairy cows. [156913]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The possibility of introducing a licensing system to allow bulls access to infected areas for the insemination of cows is currently being explored. Such movements of bulls would be subject to certain conditions similar to those set down under the current movement licences.

Artificial insemination by an inseminator is now permitted subject to certain conditions, and there are plans to allow deliveries of semen to farms, to enable farmers to carry out a simplified insemination technique, without the need for an inseminator.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reason the Army's role in dealing with the foot and mouth outbreak is restricted to logistics; and if he will assess the benefits of extending the role of the Army. [157037]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* We are grateful for the Army's contribution in support of MAFF in dealing with the foot and mouth outbreak. This contribution is not confined to the provision of logistical support, although that role has been significant. It also includes assistance in engineering and the management and operation of MAFF slaughter and disposal operations. MAFF has been able to draw on military advice on the conduct of operations, the creation of integrated control centres, crisis management techniques and contingency planning. The range and size of the Army's role is kept under continuous review.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the percentage of animals susceptible to foot and mouth disease that have natural immunity to it. [157630]

Ms Quin: Immunity to foot and mouth disease is acquired by exposure to the virus or by vaccination. As there has not been a case of foot and mouth disease in Great Britain since 1981, and we do not permit routine vaccination, all susceptible livestock are assumed to be susceptible to foot and mouth disease virus.

During the current outbreak, it is possible that there may be livestock, particularly sheep, which have been exposed to infection but have not exhibited clinical symptoms. These animals may have acquired some degree of immunity. There is also a possibility that such animals may become carriers of the virus. The number of these animals is unknown, but may be disclosed when animals are blood sampled as part of our sero-surveillance strategy.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what breaches of security there have been at the Pirbright Institute for Animal Health laboratories within the past 12 months. [157364]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* There have been no reported breaches of security at the Pirbright Animal Health laboratories.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the restrictions on the movement and sale of livestock around Layer-de-la-Haye in Essex will be lifted. [157245]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* Local veterinary inspections and serology sampling in the area will be complete by 4 May. A decision on the lifting of movement restrictions will be taken once the results of laboratory tests on these samples are known.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when movement restrictions on livestock in the Layer-de-la-Haye restricted area will be lifted. [159986]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* A new series of local veterinary inspections and serology sampling will be carried out in the area in the near future. These are necessary because the last series revealed evidence of infection. Current restrictions will remain in place until no further evidence of infection is revealed.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to enable farmers and others affected by the foot and mouth outbreak to have access to counselling, telephone helplines and other personal support services. [157372]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* MAFF has posted on its website guidance to all in the rural community wishing to seek help during the foot and mouth disease outbreak. It has also circulated to all livestock farmers in England contact details for organisations which can provide confidential advice, guidance and financial assistance, including the rural stress information network, the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution, the farm crisis network and the Samaritans. Through a rural stress action plan funded by MAFF, details of these organisations have also been widely publicised on yellow contact cards and in magazines.

In addition, the foot and mouth disease telephone helpline is open 24-hours a day, seven days a week and calls are charged at the local rate.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what veterinary visits and check-ups are being carried out on farms in Devon adjacent to those where foot and mouth disease was diagnosed before 22 March. [157838]

Ms Quin: The majority of veterinary inspection visits will have been carried out by now although a few final visits may still be being carried out. Some visits may be required for premises where a partial cull is required, for example, where only sheep or pigs are to be killed. If the farms were identified as dangerous contacts, visits will be made to supervise the cleansing and disinfection operations.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the health of the sheep at the AWE site in Foulness following the visits of officials of his Department. [157515]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The sheep at the Atomic Weapons Establishment site in Foulness were last visited by veterinary officers from the local animal health office on 30 March. The RSPCA is now taking the lead with this issue, and are continually monitoring the situation on the island. I understand that the sheep have been moved to drier land, temporary accommodation has been found, and the welfare situation has been alleviated.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what date is to be set for movements to slaughter in the Chorley area. [157992]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Chorley is in an infected area for the purpose of the control of foot and mouth disease. Movement to slaughter under licence to approved abattoirs in the same infected area has been allowed from 23 April other than from premises within three kilometres of an infected place. Urgent consideration is being given to a licensing system to allow animals from premises within three kilometres of an infected place to be moved to slaughter.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms have been involved in the cull of livestock as a result of the foot and mouth crisis; and if he will make a statement. [158055]

Ms Quin: As of 19.00 on 1 May, the total figure for premises affected by foot and mouth disease (and therefore involved in the cull of livestock) was 6,542.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many premises preventative culls have been carried out. [158203]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* As of 19.00 on 1 May, preventative culls have been carried out on 5,017 premises since the start of the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak. This includes all dangerous contacts and premises involved in voluntary culls.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the likely impact of foot and mouth on the number of farms likely to remain in business in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [158720]

Ms Quin: Foot and mouth is having a considerable impact on farming and a range of industries throughout the UK. It is still too early to make a reliable estimate of the overall effect and therefore it is not possible to make an assessment of the number of farm businesses which will cease trading as a result of the disease.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms had been identified with foot and mouth infection on the premises by midnight 9 April; and if he will make a statement. [158716]

Ms Quin: As of 19.00 on 9 April, 1,163 premises had been confirmed as being infected with foot and mouth disease.

As of 19.00 on 1 May, 1,525 premises had been confirmed as being infected with foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the Minister responsible for managing foot and mouth disease in the Welsh Assembly with regard to increased use of the Army to speed up implementation of the cull and carcase removal or incineration schemes; and if he will make a statement. [158728]

Ms Quin: The Ministry is in constant contact with the National Assembly for Wales about all matters relating to the current foot and mouth outbreak. The Army has provided valuable assistance in speeding up the slaughter and disposal of carcases.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many hunt staff in England and Wales hold slaughtering licences from his Ministry. [158260]

Ms Quin: This information is not available. Slaughtering licences are issued by the Meat Hygiene Service. They are granted on an individual basis and held for life. There is no requirement for licensed individuals to inform the Meat Hygiene Service of their current place of work and thus it is not possible to identify how many have or currently work as hunt staff.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice has been issued to establishments licensed for the training of racehorses on movements of horses into and out of foot and mouth disease restricted areas. [158391]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Officials have undertaken a detailed assessment of the risks associated with the spread of foot and mouth through the movement of racehorses. This has been posted on the MAFF website http://www.maff.gov.uk/. Officials have also liaised closely with the Jockey Club and the British Horseracing Board, which have produced detailed working guidance on the range of precautionary measures to be taken by their members. This is available from the British Horseracing Board.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his policy is towards the employment and payment of agency vets to assist in slaughtering livestock infected with foot and mouth disease. [158262]

Ms Quin: To help in current foot and mouth disease control operations the Ministry is employing veterinary surgeons as temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs) according to the standard scale of fees for temporary veterinary inspectors. These vets are employed as TVIs on an individual basis.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what powers he has to order the slaughter of animals under the contiguous culling scheme without the consent of the animals' owners. [158263]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend the Minister's powers to order the slaughter of animals in order to control foot and mouth disease are laid down in section 31, Schedule 3, paragraph 3 of the Animal Health Act 1981.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his policy is towards the use of hunt staff to slaughter livestock infected with foot and mouth disease. [158261]

Ms Quin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) on 30 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 490W.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to apply more selective criteria to dairy herds when considering the implementation of the contiguous cull policy; and if he will a statement. [158508]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend the Minister announced for England a broadening of the areas of discretion available to MAFF divisional veterinary managers. Under this revised policy, MAFF officials will continue to kill all animals which are dangerous contacts. On other contiguous premises, susceptible animals will be killed. However, cattle may be spared if there is adequate biosecurity. This will be a matter for local veterinary judgment.

MAFF has already published guidance on biosecurity measures which have been agreed with the veterinary profession. Where cattle are not culled they will be subject to regular veterinary patrols.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to test milk and blood samples from dairy herds on premises contiguous with a foot and mouth outbreak for three weeks before proceeding with a contiguous cull of such herds; and if he will make a statement. [158478]

Ms Quin: Under the revised policy on dealing with cattle on contiguous premises, announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 26 April, officials will continue to kill all animals which are dangerous contacts. On other contiguous premises, susceptible animals will be killed. However, cattle may be spared if there is adequate biosecurity. This will be a matter for local veterinary judgment.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the issuing of Form D notices to farmers by telephone. [158489]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* A Form D notice is served on premises where animals may have been exposed to infection. When foot and mouth disease is confirmed on a premises, all premises with susceptible livestock within the 3 km protected zone around the infected place are contacted, where possible, by telephone to advise them that those premises are subject to Form D restrictions. A Form D is also posted or delivered to each of those premises.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if *(a)* officials of his Department and *(b)* those acting on their behalf, asked participants in the insurance market in December 2000 and January 2001 about the availability, current and potential terms and affordability of insurance to cover losses to insureds consequent upon an event of an outbreak foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom. [158379]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* At the outset of the classical swine fever last year, the Minister established a Government/Industry working party to review ways in which the livestock industry could protect itself against the commercial consequences of any future animal disease outbreaks. The review covered the 14 OIE list A diseases that affect cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry. Foot and mouth is one of these 14 diseases.

One area considered by the working group was the extent to which insurance could be used by farmers to cover the business risks associated with becoming caught up in statutory disease control measures. Officials met the Association of British Insurers on 6 December 2000 and on 10 January 2001, Lorien plc were engaged by the

Ministry to assist the working party. Lorien subsequently contacted various insurance providers to establish what types of insurance cover was available and the level of uptake by farmers.

The working party was due to report to the Minister in the spring but this will be delayed by the current outbreak.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to visit Montgomeryshire to discuss the foot and mouth outbreak with farmers. [158721]

Ms Quin: There are no immediate plans for a ministerial visit to Montgomeryshire.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to provide information on a daily basis to farmers regarding the actions relating to the foot and mouth outbreak and the progress of the disease; and if he will make a statement. [158729]

Ms Quin: Information about the disease and the action the Government have taken has been placed on the Ministry website. This website is updated every day with the latest information and advice. Information is also available from local MAFF animal health offices. Additionally, my right hon. Friend the Minister wrote to every livestock farmer in England at the end of February enclosing information about the disease and how to protect their farm. He wrote again to farmers on two further occasions to update them on the steps we have taken to control the disease.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans there are to bring animals into Hampshire as part of the Government's culling programme. [158226]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* There are no abattoirs in Hampshire contracted to slaughter animals under the livestock welfare (disposal) scheme. There is one landfill site in the county that has been identified for the disposal of carcases under the scheme but this would only be used for local on-farm slaughters of pigs and/or sheep.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms without confirmed foot and mouth cases had been earmarked for a partial or total cull by midnight on 9 April; and if he will make a statement. [158717]

Ms Quin: As at 9 April, slaughter had taken place or was due to take place at 1,975 premises at which foot and mouth disease had not been confirmed.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the possibility of using *(a)* flame-throwers and *(b)* napalm as a means of destroying animal carcases. [159205]

Ms Quin: Flame-throwers are not in service in this country or in the USA because of safety concerns. Napalm produces very toxic compounds when burnt, so cannot be used because of the public and environmental health risks.

We recognise that burning at higher temperatures is more efficient and cleaner, and so there is a need to increase the temperature of pyres, particularly at the beginning of the burn while the water in the carcases is being driven off. We have therefore commissioned urgent studies, in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence, on the possible use of gelled fuel mixtures to increase the temperature.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what procedures are in place to ensure that no animals known to have contracted foot and mouth disease are buried at Throckmorton airfield; and how many cases have been reported to him where a mistaken diagnosis may have led to diseased animals being buried there. [158987]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* All livestock are examined by a veterinary surgeon prior to slaughter. In the event of a clinical diagnosis of foot and mouth disease, the premises is declared an infected premises. We are not aware of any carcases of livestock from infected premises that have been disposed of at Throckmorton.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what land in the vicinity of Throckmorton airfield, Worcestershire, has been purchased by Government Departments; how much land has been so purchased; at what price and for what purpose; and if he will make a statement. [158207]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Ministry has purchased 155 acres of land adjacent to the burial site at Throckmorton. The land was purchased as a buffer against the burial site and additionally as a contingency to provide extra burial capacity should it be needed. The land was purchased for £3,875,000. This price reflects the potential of part of the site for development.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to slaughter and bury on farm those farm animals stranded on farms as a result of foot and mouth movement restrictions, indicating those that are destined for the welfare slaughter scheme in *(a)* D notice areas and *(b)* other less restricted areas. [158602]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Burial on-farm of animals slaughtered through the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme is not out of the question on grounds of policy, but is very difficult to implement. Many different organisations and agencies must be consulted to ensure that the site is safe, such as the Environment Agency, communication companies, gas and oil providers and water companies. This prolonged consultation makes on-farm burial too slow to be practical for the large numbers involved.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria his Department applies when deciding to slaughter on suspicion of foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [158984]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The procedures for the slaughter of livestock on suspicion of foot and mouth disease are set out on the MAFF website http://www.maff.gov.uk/. Where a veterinary inspector carries out an investigation and is satisfied on clinical grounds that an animal exhibits signs of foot and mouth disease, the case will be confirmed on clinical grounds. Where, however, a veterinary inspector sees signs that are not totally consistent with foot and mouth disease, but where foot and mouth disease cannot be ruled out, the herd is slaughtered on suspicion.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what his estimate is of the time that *(a)* napalm and *(b)* pyre of wood takes to destroy a carcase; [158868]

(2) what his estimate is of the cost of destruction per carcase *(a)* by fuelled pyre and *(b)* by napalm after investment in suitable equipment. [158870]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Decisions on methods of disposal of carcases are taken on operational, environmental and animal and public health considerations. Napalm produces very toxic compounds when burnt, and so cannot be used because of the public and environmental health risks. Pyres burn for approximately four days.

Information on the cost of disposal per carcase is not currently available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what compensation is available to those who are unable to let grass parks because of animal movement restrictions during the foot and mouth outbreak. [159160]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Compensation is payable for the market value of animals slaughtered to control foot and mouth disease but is not payable for consequential losses caused by foot and mouth controls. There are no plans to make such payments in response to the current outbreak, but the situation will be kept under review.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received concerning the delivery of the 2001 census forms and the associated risk of the spread of foot and mouth disease; and what assessment he has made of that risk. [158960]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister has not received any formal representations concerning the risk of individuals spreading foot and mouth when delivering census forms. However, officials from the Office for National Statistics have consulted the Department over appropriate guidance to issue to enumerators, census team leaders and census district managers to ensure that the exercise is conducted in a way that will do nothing to exacerbate the foot and mouth situation. This guidance has been developed with the support of the National Farmers Unions and will ensure that the census proceeds with maximum caution in rural areas. In particular:

> Census takers will respect all restrictions in relation to foot and mouth whether put in place by the authorities or by farmers/communities themselves.
>
> On no account will census takers use taped off thoroughfares or pass warning signs.
>
> Census takers will talk to the Royal Mail about local arrangements for deliveries in rural areas where there are restrictions.
>
> Where census takers cannot reach a farm or household they will:
>
> (a) attempt to make telephone contact with the householder and arrange to deliver the form in an appropriate way, e.g. delivering the form to the farm gate or arranging for the form to reach the farm or household with other deliveries.
>
> (b) post the form to the farm or household with an information leaflet and covering letter advising the householder to post back their completed census form or to call the census helpline for further assistance about completing the form.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the risk of spreading foot and mouth by census personnel carrying out their work in rural areas. [158414]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Guidance has been issued to enumerators, census team leaders and census district managers to ensure that the exercise is conducted in a way that will do nothing to exacerbate the foot and mouth situation. This guidance has been developed with the support of the National Farmers Union and will ensure that it proceeds with maximum caution in rural areas. In particular:

> Census takers will respect all restrictions in relation to foot and mouth whether put in place by the authorities or by farmers/communities themselves.
>
> On no account will census-takers use taped off thoroughfares or pass warning signs.
>
> Census takers will talk to the Royal Mail about local arrangements for deliveries in rural areas where there are restrictions.
>
> Where census takers cannot reach a farm or household they will:
>
> (a) attempt to make telephone contact with the householder and arrange to deliver the form in an appropriate way e.g. delivering the form to the farm gate or arranging for the form to reach the farm or household with other deliveries.
>
> (b) post the form to the farm or household with an information leaflet and covering letter advising the householder to post back their completed census form or to call the census helpline for further assistance about completing the form.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received on rare breeds being protected in the event of a cull in contiguous sites until signs of the disease show; and if he will make a statement; [158962]

(2) what measures he is taking to prevent the elimination of rare breeds during the foot and mouth crisis. [157340]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 346W. Since then the Ministry has issued a joint instruction providing for rare breeds of sheep on contiguous premises to be exempted from slaughter, provided that they can be isolated from other susceptible livestock and managed in compliance with tight biosecurity. Copies of the joint instruction are on the Ministry's website http://www.maff.gov.uk/, and more detailed guidance will be issued this week.

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of available foot and mouth disease vaccines against various strains of the disease. [158881]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* As there are seven main types of foot and mouth virus (each with many sub-types), it has been necessary to focus attention on the pan-Asiatic O type virus responsible for the current outbreak. Vaccines for this strain come in different forms and strengths and their impact can vary between individual animals as well as species. However, no vaccine can be relied upon as being 100 per cent. effective against foot and mouth—not because it is in itself ineffective but either because it could be inadequately administered or because a small number of animals may respond a-typically and develop only a low level of immunity.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received concerning the cost of destroying clean animals, caught in restricted zones but not infected with foot and mouth; and if he will make a statement. [158959]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* No representations from the industry have been received by the Intervention Board concerning the cost of destroying clean animals under the livestock disposal scheme. Colleagues and officials have however initiated contact with operators of land fill sites over issues such as access and prices.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the extent of the exclusion zone following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Hawes. [159259]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The chief executive of North Yorkshire council requested that the infected area in North Yorkshire be reduced. Part of the lower Dales area of North Yorkshire has had restrictions raised but given that there are still cases in the Wensleydale/Richmond/Danby Wiske area, further changes to the infected area boundaries would be premature.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the addresses of each cremation pyre in Cumbria. [159453]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* MAFF is working with Ordnance Survey to plot the locations of all pyres and burial sites in Cumbria and elsewhere. The information will be released to all those bodies that need it for environmental and health monitoring purposes. We are considering whether the information can be released more widely without breaching the Data Protection Act 1998.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice the deputy surveyor gave to Ministers with respect to proposals for reopening the New Forest in time for the Easter weekend. [159454]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The deputy surveyor advised me that he had carried out a risk assessment which had been agreed with the state veterinary service. He advised me that the risk of foot and mouth disease occurring in the New Forest was very low. It is my view that the phased re-opening is justified on the independent and professional advice I have received.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he received regarding re-opening the New Forest; and if he will make a statement; [159266]

(2) from what organisations and individuals he sought advice prior to opening the New Forest at Easter. [159267]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* I received advice and representations from, among others, the Verderers, the Commoners' Defence Association, members of the New Forest Committee, the New Forest district council, English Nature, the National Farmers' Union, the Countryside Alliance, the State Veterinary Service and the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what have been the results of foot and mouth tests carried out on wild deer since the current outbreak began. [R] [159944]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* A number of deer have been tested for foot and mouth disease, all with negative results.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the comments made by Dr. Stuart Renton on the origin and development of the foot and mouth epidemic in Britain; [160206]

(2) pursuant to his statement of 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 827–53, on the likely source farm of the foot and mouth outbreak, what changes there have been in the Government's assessment of the situation; and what new information has come into the possession of the Government; [160237]

(3) if he will publish the advice supplied to the Government by Dr. Stuart Renton on the origin and development of the foot and mouth epidemic. [160205]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The farm where foot and mouth disease infectivity was first present is still believed to be the Heddon-on-the-Wall case. Dr. Renton has not submitted advice or any evidence to the Government on the origin of the farm outbreak.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those cases of foot and mouth in the National Parks which *(a)* have been reported, *(b)* await results of full testing and *(c)* have been confirmed following full testing procedures. [160285]

Ms Quin: We regret that it is not possible to provide a list of *(a)* reported cases or *(b)* those subject to testing without breaching the Data Protection Act 1998. A list of infected premises within English National Parks is however provided because of the legitimate public interest in the information being in the public domain.

Providing actual numbers of reported cases can be achieved only at disproportionate cost. However as far as *(b)* there are 19 premises subject to testing and 54 infected premises. Information is subject to changes as results of testing are confirmed but is correct as of 3 May.

Name and addresses of infected premises within English National Parks

Temple, Black Hall Farm, Seathwaite, Broughton in Furness, Cumbria
Mitchell, Hesket Hall, Hasket Newmarket, Cumbria
Holland, Bank End Farm, Hesket Newmarket, Wigton, Cumbria
Gillett, Kilncroft, Thackthwaite, Dacre, Penrith, Cumbria
Crosthwaite, Green Close, Penruddock, Penrith
Kendal, Outgang Farm, Helton, Askham, Penrith, Cumbria
Oliver, Cawfields, Haltwhistle, Northumberland
Armstrong, Grindon Hall Farm, Haydon Bridge, Hexham, Northumberland
Angus, Hazel Head Farm, Ulpha, Broughton in Fourness, Cumbria
Pratt, The Ashes, Hawes, North Yorkshire
Dinsdale, West Lea, Gayle, Hawes, North Yorkshire
Bowe, Cartriggs Farm, Hawes, North Yorkshire
Pratt, Hunger Hill, Burtersett, Hawes, North Yorkshire
Lambert, Raygill Farm, Hawes, North Yorkshire
Windsor, Dunnabridge Farm, Princetown, Yelverton, Devon
Fawcett, Hill Top Farm, Askrigg, Leyburn, North Yorkshire
Armstrong, Mosedale End Farm, Mosedale, Penrith, Cumbria
Benn, Crook-a-Fleet, Mungrisdale, Penrith, Cumbria
Strong, Holecrook, Weskot New Market, Witon, Cumbria
Hope, Blackburn Fram, Wark, Hexham, Northumberland
Cousins, Foresthall Farm, Selside, Kendal, Cumbria
Waugh, Mireholme, Bassenthwaite, Cumbria
Scrimgeour, Lonscale, Brundholme, Threlkeld, Cumbria
Clarkson, Throstle Nest Farm, Aysgarth, Leyburn, North Yorkshire
Yeats, Cloughfoot Farm, Haltwhistle, Northumberland
Coward, Low Rough Hill, Askham, Penrith, Cumbria
Wearing, Hill Farm, Heathwaite, Grizebeck, Cumbria
Reeds, Moss Kennels, Hayden Bridge, Hexham, Northumberland
Littlejohns, Minehouse Farm, Okehampton, Devon
Winder and Co. Borderiggs, Broughton-in-Furness, Cumbria
Lambert, Brough Hill Farm, Bainbridge, Leyburn, North Yorkshire
Richardson, Greenlands Farm, Cockermouth, Cumbria
Postlethwite, Armaside Farm, Lorton, Cockermouth, Cumbria
Jackson, Oxen Park Farm, Oxen Park, Ulverston, Cumbria
Boyren, Hill Park, Colton, Ulverston, Cumbria
Norman, Kirkhouse Farm, Setmurthy, Cockermouth, Cumbria
Heseltine, Crossfields, Aysgarth, Leyburn, North Yorkshire
Pearson, The Faulds, Caldbeck, Wigton, Cumbria
Edmondson, Walloway, Pennidock, Penrith, Cumbria
Rigg, Biggards Farm, Calderbeck, Wigton, Cumbria
Ostle, Mill House Farm, Wellington, Seascale, Cumbria
Ritson, Baggra Yeat, Uldale, Wigton, Cumbria
Lord Inglewood, Old Scales Farm, Wythop, Cockermouth, Cumbria
Wilson, Limedale, Uldale, Wigton, Cumbria
John Sutcliffe, Bridgefield Farm, Lowick Bridge, Lowick, Ulverston, Cumbria
Sherwen and Sons, Bridge Petton, Gosforth, Seascale, Cumbria
Thompson, Great Knott Farm, Blawith, Ulverston, Cumbria
Twentyman, Croft House, Aughertree, Wigton, Cumbria
Dickinson, Abbott Park, Colton, Greenwood, Ulverston, Cumbria
Dickinson, Force Forge, Satterthwaite, Ulverston, Cumbria
Wilson, Gate Farm, Uldale, Wigton, Cumbria
Ridley, Wood Hall, Hesket New Market, Wigton, Cumbria
Pattinson, Uldale Hall, Uldale, Wigton, Cumbria
Marrs, Manor Farm, High Ireby, Wigton, Cumbria.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what conclusions he has reached following the consultations on proposals to protect rare breeds and hefted sheep; and if he will make a statement. [160778]

Mr. Morley: On 19 April, proposals concerning the exemption of rare breeds and hefted sheep from the contiguous and 3 km cull were published and views sought. The vast majority of respondents to this exercise welcomed the proposals. Arrangements for exempting rare breeds of sheep and goats, and other pedigree sheep and goats of high genetic value, and genuinely hefted sheep, such as Herdwicks and Swaledales, from contiguous and 3 km culls have now been introduced and guidance issued. The guidance explains what information needs to be submitted to gain exemption. I am placing a copy of this guidance in the Library of the House.

These arrangements allow for owners of sheep or goats—who think their stock may qualify and are notified it is to be slaughtered as part of a contiguous or 3 km cull—to apply for exemption from their local divisional veterinary manager (DVM). Owners need to show that the animals can be isolated from other susceptible livestock, and managed in compliance with tight biosecurity. Before registration as an exempted flock/herd, the DVM will arrange for blood samples to be taken for testing. The results for these blood tests must be negative for registration to be granted; positive blood tests will result in the flock/herd being slaughtered.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the risk to the health of pregnant women from inhaling smoke from the burning of *(a)* infected and *(b)* uninfected carcases. [157369]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Health's assessment of the risks to health of emissions from pyres burning carcases is published on its website www.doh.gov.uk/fmdguidance/index.htm. Copies are also available in the Library. This assessment covers all sectors of the population, including pregnant women. Inhalation of smoke from pyres burning carcases is not considered to pose a risk to humans of infection with foot and mouth virus and so no difference in risk is anticipated from burning either infected or uninfected carcases.

GM Fish

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the dedicated research being undertaken into the potential effects on biodiversity of the use of GM aquaculture stocks; [157267]

(2) if he will list the research studies used by the Government to evaluate the potential risks of introducing GM fish varieties into aquaculture. [159811]

Ms Quin: The Ministry has not commissioned any research in this area. The potential risks of releasing GM fish are well understood and are considered in a booklet published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions entitled "Guidance for Experimental Releases of Genetically Modified Fish" (ACRE Guidance Note 8, February 1997). This is available in the House Library. Anyone proposing the release of a GM fish would have to submit a full dossier of risk assessment data as part of the statutory consent procedure.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the research programmes into fish genetics his Department has been involved with in the last 10 years. [157276]

Ms Quin: The Ministry has commissioned the following projects in the broad area of fish genetics, only one of which (FC1126) was related to the possible development of transgenic fish:

Code	*Project title*
SF0102	The genetic identification of Atlantic salmon populations.
SF0103	Collation and analysis of data on genetic variation in Atlantic salmon from the British Isles.
SF0217	The role of the major histocompatibility complex in kin recognition in Atlantic salmon.
SF0223	Behavioural genetics and spawning success of spring run Atlantic salmon in the Girnock Burn, Aberdeenshire.
SF0210	Molecular genetics for discrimination in marine fish and salmonids.
SF0224	Detection of triploidy in Rainbow trout and Brown trout by fluorescence in situ hybridisation.
FC0207	Production of sexually sterile bivalve molluscs.
FC0215	Enhancing growth and survival of hatchery produced scallops.
FC1118	The molecular basis for the pathogenicity of viral haemorrhagic septicaemia virus.
FC1126	Designing fish for disease resistance.
FC1139	Improving the health of fish by promoting natural disease resistance—a molecular biological approach.
MF0146	Genetic identification of fish eggs by species-specific DNA markers for use in stock biomass assessments by the egg production method.
MF0226	Population genetics of shellfish in British waters.
MF0428	Large scale evaluation of fish egg identification using genetic probes.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps the UK Government have taken to enforce Article 9.3.1 of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation code of conduct on minimising the harmful effects of introducing genetically altered fish stocks. [157270]

Ms Quin: In line with EU directive 90/220, a consent to release transgenic fish would be granted only if a rigorous assessment confirmed there was no unacceptable risk to human health or the environment. The assessment would take into account the likelihood of farmed fish escaping into open waters and look in detail at the potential impact on wild stocks. This policy is fully in accord with the UN/FAO code of conduct for responsible fisheries.

Stationery and Printing

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total gross running costs were to his Department in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997 of *(a)* stationery and *(b)* printing and publishing. [157628]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* Our records show that the total gross running costs to core MAFF in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997 of *(a)* stationery and *(b)* printing and publishing were £1.912 million and £835,500 respectively.

Parliamentary Questions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Vale of York on 27 March relating to protection of rare breeds during the foot and mouth crisis (ref: 156277). [157367]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on 30 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 493W.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will provide a substantive answer to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton on 28 March 2001, relating to the foot and mouth infected area around Stonesby, Leicestershire. [157489]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 30 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 493W.

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will provide a substantive answer to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Salisbury for answer on 29 March. [160345]

Ms Quin: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 3 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 737W.

A/F Protein Inc.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if *(a)* he and *(b)* his Department's officials have met representatives of A/F Protein Inc. of Waltham, Massachusetts, United States; [157769]

(2) what representations *(a)* he and *(b)* his Department's officials have received from representatives of A/F Protein Inc. of Waltham, Massachusetts, United States of America; and what response he has made. [157770]

Ms Quin: To the best of our knowledge, neither Ministers nor officials have met or received representations from anyone associated with A/F Protein Inc.

Fisheries and Aquaculture (State Aid)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his Department's policy is on the European Commission's new guidelines for the examination of state aid to fisheries and aquaculture; and if he will make a statement. [157839]

Mr. Morley: The new guidelines for the examination of state aid to fisheries and aquaculture (2001/C 19/05) build on the previous guidelines. Among the changes made they tighten rules relating to the provision of operating aid and require more consistency with the conditions applying to grants under the EU fisheries structure fund. The UK, along with the other member states, were consulted on the new guidelines and will comply with them.

EpiMan Computer Programme

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Department acquired *(a)* the EpiMan computer programme, *(b)* associated hardware and *(c)* access to expertise and advice for its (i) installation and (ii) operation; at what total cost; and when the EpiMan programme and operating system was (1) installed and (2) operating for full use by his Department. [157633]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Ministry was already contracted partners to the EpiMan project in 1996. The start-up costs were approximately £16,000. An updated version of the system was obtained and installed on Monday 19 February 2001 at no additional cost. The associated hardware was already available and access to expertise and advice, specifically for its use in the current epidemic, was operational from the time of confirmation of the first case. It is not possible to estimate the cost of operating this system.

Departmental Policies (Plymouth Unitary Authority)

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on the Plymouth unitary authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158026]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 annual agricultural and horticultural census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census has been placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU common agricultural policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

Average subsidies received by full-time farm businesses—England 1999–2000

£000

		Of which:			
	Total direct subsidies	Crop subsidies	Livestock subsidies	Agri-environment	Other[1]
Cereals	37.8	34.2	2.3	1.0	0.1
General cropping	31.8	28.8	2.4	0.6	0.0
Horticulture	0.40	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.2
Pigs and poultry	3.6	2.2	1.4	0.1	0.0
Dairy	8.5	2.8	4.9	0.8	0.0
LFA cattle and Sheep	29.3	0.4	25.4	3.3	0.2
Lowland cattle and sheep	14.1	1.7	10.6	1.8	0.0
Mixed	33.8	21.4	10.7	1.7	0.0
All types	22.5	14.8	6.4	1.2	0.1

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes

Notes:

1. HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies
2. The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under the CAP

Source:

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short-term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

This incudes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the beef special premium scheme and suckler cow premium scheme respectively.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

Since May 1997, the Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

Since May 1997, the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by countryside stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and

£18 million in 2001–02. Full-time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the hill farm allowance scheme this year. This compares to £4,048 under the hill livestock compensatory allowance in 1996–97.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the rural development regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England rural development programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over the period 2000–06.

Farmers in South-West Devon can benefit from schemes available under the ERDP. Three of the schemes within the programme—rural enterprise, processing and marketing, and vocational training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the ERDP.

Furthermore, by supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for public good such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

Consumers in Plymouth, Sutton, Plymouth, Devonport and South-West Devon will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010. In relation to the Department's responsibility for fisheries policy, our key priority is to protect our fisheries resources for the future and we are taking firm action to ensure a viable future for the fishing industry. The last set of grant schemes, which ended in 1999, invested over £27 million in measures to help the fishing industry in England. Fishermen operating in the Plymouth, Sutton, Plymouth, Devonport and South-West Devon constituencies will now benefit from the £22.5 million aid package announced on 2 April, to help restructure the English fishing industry, to improve the quality and value of the catch, and to retrain fishermen and rejuvenate fishing ports.

Wild Deer Cull

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his policy is on the culling of wild deer in Wiltshire in the spring; and if he will make a statement. [158196]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Ministry has no plans for such a cull.

Invicta Lamb

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the implications for the farming industry of the closure of Invicta Lamb at Lamberhurst, Kent. [159594]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The Invicta Lamb abattoir at Lamberhurst was an important outlet for sheepmeat from the south of England in particular for export to the Continent.

Animal Movements

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the average distance moved by *(a)* sheep and *(b)* cattle intended for slaughter between farm and abattoir was in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* the latest year for which figures are available. [159596]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The information is not available.

Sugar Beet

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he will pursue to encourage transporters of sugar beet to use trunk roads for journeys to and from sugar beet factories. [159987]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Transporters of sugar beet must meet the relevant restrictions applicable to infected areas. The movement of sugar beet is not expected again until the autumn.

Meat Imports

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to reduce risks posed by the importation of meat products by passengers from abroad. [159951]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* As my right hon. Friend the Minister said in his statement on 27 March, this Ministry is co-ordinating action across Government to ensure that rules on imports by passengers are enforced effectively.

Bovine TB

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the level of testing for bovine TB and associated slaughtering in the national herd since 20 February. [160208]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Almost all routine testing for TB in cattle has been put on hold, with state veterinary service (SVS) resources diverted to deal with the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. In most areas, reactor cattle disclosed by testing carried out before the imposition of FMD movement restrictions are being held on farms. Decisions on re-tests on inconclusive reactors and short interval tests are being made on a case-by-case basis according to the FMD situation in different divisions of the SVS.

Krebs Trials

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the impact of the foot and mouth epidemic on the Krebs trials. [160207]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Operations in the badger culling field trial were scheduled to resume after the close season ended on 1 May. However, preparations for the 2001 culling programme have been delayed because MAFF wildlife unit staff have been redeployed to assist with foot and mouth disease control measures. Some management functions are being maintained to ensure that the wildlife unit can rapidly move back into trial operations.

HEALTH

Consultant Vacancies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many vacancies there were for consultants in each year since 1995 broken down *(a)* by specialty and *(b)* by health authority; and if he will make a statement; [148087]

(2) how many vacancies there were in the NHS for consultants by specialty in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [150390]

Mr. Denham: The data requested were not collected centrally before 1999. They are now published annually in the Department of Health Vacancies Survey, which has been published in the Library.

The total number of consultants as at 30 September 2000 (the latest figure) was 24,310—an increase of 1,081 or 4 per cent. on the year before.

Waiting Lists

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients were waiting on in-patient lists at each *(a)* NHS trust and *(b)* health authority area in March 1997; [153487]

(2) how many patients were waiting more than 13 weeks on out-patient lists at each *(a)* NHS trust and *(b)* health authority in March 1997; [153488]

(3) which *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities have more (i) in-patients and (ii) out-patients waiting 12 months for their operations than in March 1997. [153473]

Mr. Denham: The data requested are publicly available in the following publications prepared by the Government Statistical Service (available in the Library):

Hospital in-patient waiting list statistics, England, National Health Service trust based: The "Green Book".

Hospital in-patient waiting list statistics, England, population based: The "Yellow Book".

Waiting times for first out-patient appointment, England, NHS trust based: The "Red Book".

Waiting times for first out-patient appointment, England, population based: The "Purple Book".

Import Checks (Southampton)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inspectors are employed to check imports of *(a)* meat and meat products and *(b)* fruit and vegetables at Southampton; what percentage of containers or loads are inspected; how many shipments have been rejected in the past year; what was the country of (i) production and (ii) export; and if he will make a statement. [155118]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 23 March 2001]:* At present, data from enforcement authorities in respect of imported food are not separately identified. Under the terms of the new Framework Agreement between the Food Standards Agency and local food authorities, recently agreed, information specifically on imported foods will be available, but not before 2002.

Checks at Southampton port on meat, meat products, fruit and vegetables imported from third countries are the responsibility of the Port Health Authority. Imports of these foods from member states of the European Union are not subject to border controls. Imports of meat and meat products from other EU member states are subject to random checks at their point of destination within the United Kingdom.

Mental Health National Service

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the effects have been in Shrewsbury and Atcham on mental health patients of the introduction of the mental health national service framework. [156494]

Mr. Hutton: The mental health national service framework sets national standards and defines service models for promoting mental health and treating mental illness in the five following areas: mental health promotion, primary care and access to services, effective services for people with severe mental illness, caring about carers, and preventing suicide.

The local implementation team in Shropshire with responsibility for delivery of the mental health national service framework and the national health service plan (mental health) requirement is working actively to deliver the necessary changes in local services.

A stocktake of primary care mental health services is under way, as a bridge to improved links and joint work with primary care and general practitioners. The funding for an assertive outreach team has been identified, to serve the people of Shrewsbury and Atcham, and this will be functional this year. The low secure service on Wroxeter Ward is part of the regional network of secure services, and offers 16 beds providing a focus on rehabilitation.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been made available to help providers in South Cheshire deliver the provisions in the national service framework for mental health in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [159920]

Mr. Hutton: Modernisation money allocated to South Cheshire health authority for adult, adolescent and child mental health services for the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 is shown in the table. These figures do not include funding made available to local providers of mental health services by the health authority from their general allocation. The figures also exclude allocations to local authorities for mental health services for the residents of South Cheshire.

Modernisation funds

Year	*£*
1999–2000	279,000
2000–01	316,000

Funding details for South Cheshire health authority are not yet available for the year 2001–02. However, the national health service plan announced that there will be significant investment for the development of mental health services for the period 2001 to 2004 and health authority allocations will be made available on the basis of weighted populations.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been made available to help providers deliver the provisions in the national service framework for mental health in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [159919]

Mr. Hutton: In 1999–2000 an additional £68.5 million, and in 2000–01 a further £66 million was made available to providers to deliver the provisions in the national service framework for mental health. In the period 2001–02 to 2003–04 an extra investment of £329 million will be provided to fast forward the national service framework and to enable us to deliver our national plan commitments. In addition £30 million for 2001–02 to 20002–03 will be made available to improve the physical infrastructure in acute wards.

GPs

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of hours worked per week by general practitioners in England and Wales was in *(a)* 1971, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 2000. [157882]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The only data on hours worked by general practitioners are from the general medical practitioners (GMP) workload surveys. One was carried out in 1989–90. Details in the table show hours worked on general medical service (GMS) and non-GMS duties. The information is for Great Britain and is not available for England and Wales only.

Average[1] number of hours worked per week by general medical practitioners by type of activity, 1989–90

	Hours
GMS and non-GMS duties	41.99
of which:	
GMS duties	37.01

[1] Average is calculated whether or not the GMPs were involved in the activity in their recording week.

Source:

GMP workload survey 1989–90

Profound and Multiple Disabilities

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reduction in the number of services for profound and multiple disabilities in the last three years. [158085]

Mr. Hutton: It is the responsibility of local statutory authorities to determine the level of services required in their area. Data on services for people with profound and multiple disabilities are not held centrally, but it is widely recognised that the number of children and young people with profound and multiple disabilities who survive into adulthood is increasing. The recently published White Paper "Valuing People, a New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21 Century" specifically recognises the needs of people with profound and multiple disabilities.

It included our target for an additional 6,000 severely disabled children by 2002 to receive support by a co-ordinated care package from health and social services. Additionally integrated health and social services for children and young people with severe disabilities and complex needs will be one of the priority uses of the capital element of the learning disability development fund. Support for families of disabled children is also being given through the Government's "Quality Protects" programme and through the New Opportunity Fund providing grants for projects offering palliative care to children with life limiting illness and their families.

Meat Inspection

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce hazard analysis critical control points to the meat inspection system in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [158501]

Ms Stuart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) on 3 April 2001, *Official Report,* columns 137–39W.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received concerning the introduction of hazard analysis critical points to the meat inspection system in the United Kingdom. [158502]

Ms Stuart: Representations on hazard analysis and critical control points and the future control of meat inspection have been received from UNISON and hon. Members on behalf of constituents. I am advised that UNISON and the Association of Meat Inspectors have also been holding discussions on this issue with the Food Standards Agency.

Council of Europe Public Health Committee

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what objectives he is pursuing in relation to the market in food supplements through the Council of Europe and meetings of its public health committee. [159179]

Ms Stuart: We consider that in the interests of consumer choice the market for supplements sold under food law should be open to all products which are safe and appropriately labelled.

Drugs

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been made available for *(a)* drug education and prevention and *(b)* drug rehabilitation in Luton since 1 May 1997. [159416]

Ms Stuart: Information on funding for drug education, prevention and rehabilitation is not available centrally for Luton. National health service funding for these services is provided to Bedfordshire health authority. The Luton drug action team will receive its share of the new pooled treatment budget via Bedfordshire health authority and has been allocated £1,199,000 for 2001–02.

Drug treatment in the Luton drug action team area is mostly provided from NHS, social services, police, Probation and Prison Service funds that are embedded within mainstream services and cannot readily be disaggregated. However, certain earmarked grants and allocations to Bedfordshire health authority can.

	£000
Drug misuse special allocation	
1997–98	410
1998–99	436
1999–2000	537
2000–01	568
In-year addition	
2000–01	118

	£000
Health Action Zone drug prevention work in Luton	
1998–99	200
1999–2000	100

Eastbourne Hospital

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average waiting times were for a first appointment with a consultant at Eastbourne District General Hospital in *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available; [159191]

(2) what the average wait was at Eastbourne District General Hospital for a first out-patient appointment in *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* on the latest date for which figures are available. [160131]

Ms Stuart: The information requested can be found in "Waiting times for first out-patient appointments in England: Detailed statistics". This is published quarterly and can be found in the Library.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the list of medical conditions exempt from prescription charges was last reviewed; [159754]

(2) what criteria he uses for exempting medical conditions from prescription charges. [159787]

Ms Stuart: The list of medical conditions conferring exemption from prescription charges was agreed with the medical profession in 1968. It was last reviewed as part of the comprehensive spending review in 1998. We concluded that there should be no change to the list of conditions conferring exemption for the rest of this Parliament.

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what it would cost to exempt people with Parkinson's disease from prescription charges; [159786]

(2) how many people with Parkinson's disease are required to pay for their prescriptions. [159785]

Ms Stuart: Information about people with Parkinson's disease who are required to pay for their prescriptions is not held centrally. We cannot, therefore, provide a reliable estimate of the cost of exempting all people with Parkinson's disease. However, many people with Parkinson's disease will be aged 60 or more and already entitled to free prescriptions.

Treatments (Children)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to monitor the use of unlicensed and off-label treatments on children; and if he will make a statement; [159605]

(2) what research his Department has carried out into the extent of the use of unlicensed and off-label treatments on children; and if he will make a statement. [159606]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The vast majority of medicines on the United Kingdom market have been granted a marketing authorisation. Use of medicines in children where this is not specified in the marketing authorisation ('off-label' use) is permitted under UK law where the clinician believes it is justified. This is a matter for clinical judgment, informed by specialist guidance produced by and available to the profession. The Medicines Control Agency and Committee on Safety of Medicines continue to monitor the safety of all medicines, whether used within their product licence or used unlicensed or 'off-label'.

It is our view that children should have access to medicines that have been fully evaluated for use in childhood. As medicines regulation in the UK derives largely from European legislation, an international approach is needed. We have therefore raised the profile of the issue at European level to encourage companies to undertake appropriate trials on the use of medicines in the treatment of children. This formed the basis for an international guideline, operational in the European Union from January, and applicable in the United States of America and Japan. In addition the European Commission has been asked to develop measures for children's medicines. We await their proposals.

Hospital Hygiene

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional money has been made available to West Hertfordshire NHS trust as a result of the recent report on cleanliness in hospitals. [159537]

Mr. Denham: An allocation of £150,000 was made last year to improve the patient environment at West Hertfordshire Hospitals national health service trust. A further allocation is currently being determined and will be announced shortly.

Waiting Times

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what initiatives he has introduced to ensure compatibility of waiting times between health authorities. [160069]

Mr. Denham: Our national health service plan targets will reduce the maximum waiting time for in-patient treatment to six months and for out-patient appointments to three months by 2005. The modernisation agency and the Department's regional offices are working with the NHS to significantly improve access to care and to reduce variations in waiting times in the areas with the longest waits.

Audiology Services

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the waiting times for initial hearing tests for *(a)* adults and *(b)* children. [160068]

Mr. Hutton: Information on waiting times for initial hearing tests is not collected centrally.

The "Action on Ear Nose and Throat (ENT)" initiative, which has been established as part of our modernisation strategy for the national health service, is looking at improving access to ENT and audiology services. Departments are being supported to re-design the way services are provided, in order to improve access and reduce waiting times. One element of the initiative focuses specifically on audiology, with the aim of spreading best practice to all audiology departments.

Residential Care Homes (North-west)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* private and *(b)* local authority residential homes in the north-west there were in the years from 1997 to date. [160089]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of independent and local authority staffed residential care homes in the north-west region. Information is presented for the years 1997 to 2000.

Number of local authority staffed, private and dual registered residential care homes in the north-west region[1], 1997 to 2000, as at 31 March

Year	*Total number of homes*	*Local authority staffed homes*	*Independent homes[2]*	*Dual registered homes[3]*
1997	3,196	345	2,570	281
1998	3,594	323	2,845	426
1999	3,599	309	2,872	418
2000	3,703	304	2,947	452

[1] The Government Office regions of north-west and Merseyside.

[2] Consists of voluntary, private and small homes.

[3] Homes that are registered to provide both residential and nursing care operated by the independent sector.

Source:

Department of Health annual return RA form A.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160057]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 1 May 2001, *Official Report,* column 607W.

Cataract Operations

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the waiting list was for those waiting for cataract operations on the NHS in the north-west in each of the years from 1997 to date; [160088]

(2) what the cost of a cataract operation was in the north-west in each of the years from 1997 to date. [160087]

Mr. Denham: We do not collect procedure specific waiting list information.

The cost of a cataract operation in the north-west from 1997 to date is shown in the table.

North-west regional average costs for a cataract operation

£ mean average

Narrative and admission type	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Day case	621	620	570
Elective inpatient	693	839	791
Non-elective inpatient	814	1,317	1,359

Note:

These data relate to the financial years as stated.

Refrigerants

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which premises owned and leased by his Department use *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons and *(b)* hydrochlorofluorocarbons for refrigeration and other relevant energy needs; if he will publish details of such use and the reasons for it; and what specific guidance on the use of these substances he has issued to NHS trusts. [159965]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Of the buildings owned or leased by the Department, three of its main headquarters buildings and three of its main regional office buildings use hydrochlorofluorocarbons as refrigerant in air conditioning systems. The Department is looking at options to replace these with more environmentally friendly alternatives.

Guidance issued to the National Health Service is to ensure that they do not purchase any products that use chlorofluorocarbons, and hydrochlorofluorocarbons where there are suitable alternatives.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will receive a reply to his letter of 25 January concerning Mr. Heywood-Waddington of Chelmsford; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in replying. [160166]

Mr. Hutton: A reply to the hon. Gentleman's letter was sent on 2 May 2001.

I apologise for the delay in replying to his correspondence but, unfortunately, his letter did go astray within the Department. A copy of his correspondence was sought and faxed through to the Department on 1 May. New operational procedures have been introduced in the Department to ensure that this sort of delay should not happen again.

Breast Reduction Surgery

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 583W, on surgical treatments, when he expects the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to discuss procedures for offering breast reduction surgery following clinical recommendations and reduce the postcode lottery in this area of health care; and if he will make a statement. [160163]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Breast reduction surgery was assessed against the criteria for proposing topics to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, and it was decided that it should not be referred at this time.

NHS Trusts (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS hospital trusts cover the Greater London area. [160267]

Mr. Denham: There are 32 acute hospital national health service trusts and 37 non-acute trusts in the Greater London area effective of 1 April 2001. These are listed in the table.

NHS trusts in the London region

Trust name	*Type*
Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute
Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute
Barts and The London NHS Trust	Acute
Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust	Acute
Ealing Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust	Acute
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust	Acute
Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust	Acute
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Homerton Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
King's College Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Kingston Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust	Acute
Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Newham Healthcare NHS Trust	Acute
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute
Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Queen Mary's, Sidcup NHS Trust	Acute
Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust	Acute
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	Acute
Royal Marsden NHS Trust	Acute
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust	Acute
St. Mary's NHS Trust	Acute
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust	Acute
West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Whipps Cross University Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	Acute
London Ambulance Service NHS Trust	Ambulance service
Camden and Islington Community Health Services NHS Trust	Community
Community Health South London NHS Trust	Community
Croydon and Surrey Downs Community Health NHS Trust	Community
Harrow & Hillingdon Healthcare NHS Trust	Community
Riverside Community Health Care NHS Trust	Community
South West London Community NHS Trust	Community
Hounslow and Spelthorne Community and Mental Health NHS Trust	Community and mental health
Oxleas NHS Trust	Community and mental health
Parkside Health NHS Trust	Community and mental health
Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust	Community and mental health
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental health
Brent, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental health
Camden and Islington Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental health
East London and The City Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental health
North East London Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental health
South London and Maudsley Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental health
South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental health
West London Mental Health NHS Trust	Mental health
Barking and Dagenham Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Barnet Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Bexley Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Bromley Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Chingford, Wanstead and Woodford Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
City and Hackney Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Enfield Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Greenwich Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Haringey Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Havering Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Hillingdon Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Kingston Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Nelson and West Merton Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Newham Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Redbridge Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Teddington, Twickenham and Hampton Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust
Walthamstow, Leyton and Leytonstone Primary Care Trust	Primary care trust

NHS Direct (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each month for which data is available how many telephone calls were received by NHS Direct from people living in Shrewsbury and Atcham; and if he will make a statement. [160368]

Ms Stuart: NHS Direct Stafford, which covers the Shrewsbury and Atcham area in Shropshire, became live on 31 October 2000. Information is not collected on a constituency basis, but the number of telephone calls received from people with a Shropshire postcode is shown in the table.

Month	*Number*
October 2000[1]	20
November 2000	437
December 2000	740
January 2001	1,018
February 2001	1,062
March 2001[2]	1,691

[1] Covers one day (31 October 2000)

[2] Increase in numbers coincides with television advertisement campaign in the Central TV region.

source:

NHS Direct Stafford

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were employed at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [160364]

Yvette Cooper: The table shows the number of hospital medical and dental staff employed by the Royal Shrewsbury hospital national health service trust in both 1997 and 2000. This indicates an increase in the number of doctors working at the trust:

Hospital medical and dental staff within the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust

At 30 September	*Number*
1997	200
2000	220

Note

Figures rounded to the nearest 10

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

We are committed to further increasing the number of staff in the national health service and outlined proposals for this in the NHS plan, published in July 2000. Proposals include 7,500 more consultants and 2000 more general practitioners by 2004.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the health authorities in which beta interferon is made available to newly diagnosed MS sufferers; [160262]

(2) what guidance he has given to health authorities on their policies on the use of beta interferon pending the outcome of the NICE review. [160261]

Mr. Denham: We have recently reminded all chief executives in the National Health Service that existing guidance contained in circulars EL(95)97 and HSC 1999–176 remains in place pending the publication of authoritative guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Information about health authorities' policies on the treatment of multiple sclerosis is not available centrally. Any such policies should provide for individual cases to be considered on their merits in the light of the evidence available on different forms of treatment.

Overseas Visits

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the overseas countries visited by each Minister in his Department as part of their official duties in each of the last five years. [160327]

Ms Stuart: Health Ministers as part of their official duties have visited the following countries.

Year/country	*Visitor*
1997	
Belgium	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Public Health) (PS(PH))
France	PS(PH)
1998	
Germany	Secretary of State (SofS)
France	SofS
South Africa	SofS
USA	SofS
Barbados	SofS
Sweden	Minister of State (Commons) (MS(C))
Japan	MS(C)
Belgium	PS(PH)
Italy	PS(PH)
Luxembourg	PS(PH)
1999	
Switzerland	SofS
France	MS(C)
USA	MS(C), PS(PH)
Italy	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Lords) (PS(L)
Singapore	PS(L)
Turkey	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Health) (PS(H))
Finland	PS(H)
Belgium	PS(H)
Greece	PS(PH)
Luxembourg	PS(PH)
2000	
USA	MS(H)
Belgium	PS(L), PS(H)
Switzerland	PS(H)
Germany	PS(H)
France	PS(H)
Luxembourg	PS(H)
Ireland	PS(H)
Sweden	PS(H)
2001	
Belgium	PS(L)
Sweden	PS(H)
Germany	PS(H)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of sending *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants to health conferences in (i) the UK and (ii) overseas in each of the last five years. [160328]

Ms Stuart: The Department does not collect the information in the form requested and an answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NHS Direct

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to date of NHS Direct. [160306]

Ms Stuart: NHS Direct has been funded from a top-sliced central budget. The total costs of the service since 1998–99 are given in the table. These costs include all set-up costs for establishing the call centre environment, and central costs.

£ million

Year	*Total cost*
1998–99	14
1999–2000	55
2000–01	89.1

The 2000–01 figures are an estimate based on latest information. The final costs will not fluctuate widely from the information in the table.

Commission for Health Improvement

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost to date of the introduction and operation of the Commission for Health Improvement. [160311]

Mr. Denham: Not including the preparatory administrative costs borne by the Department (which could not be identified without disproportionate effort), the cost of establishing and continued operation of the Commission for Health Improvement between 1 November 1999, when it came into being, and 31 March 2001, is £13.7 million. This total includes a proportionate contribution from the National Assembly for Wales.

The breakdown of expenditure in each year is shown in the table:

Year	*£ million*
November 1999-March 2000	2.3
April 2000-March 2001	11.4

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will provide a substantive answer to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Salisbury for answer on 23 March. [160344]

Ms Stuart: I replied to the hon. Member today.

ME

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many ME specialist clinics have outreach mobile units to go to those whose symptoms are so severe as to render them bed or house-bound; [160332]

(2) if he will list those NHS trusts which provide specialist out-patient clinics for those suffering from ME; [160329]

(3) if he will list the NHS trusts which provide specialist *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* ward facilities for those suffering from ME. [160331]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not held centrally.

The National Health Service provides a considerable number of services which people suffering from chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) access. These patients are seen within a wide range of hospital specialities including general medicine, neurology and immunology. The CFS/ME working group is developing guidance to improve the quality of care for CFS/ME patients.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors specialising in ME are attached to NHS trusts in the *(a)* Cambridgeshire/Peterborough, *(b)* Lincolnshire and *(c)* Northamptonshire health authority areas. [160333]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available centrally or collected in Lincolnshire. Addenbrooke's national health service trust is reported to have five general neurologists working across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. In Northamptonshire, no one clinician has been identified with a particular interest in CFS/ME, although general physicians and neurologists are available to exclude alternative diagnosis.

Children's Secure Accommodation

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each appropriate English local authority the most recently available average amount which is spent per annum per child on children held in secure accommodation, together with the number of such secure placements in the most recent period for which figures are available. [160336]

Mr. Hutton: At 31 March 2000 there were 436 approved places in local authority secure accommodation. Information on numbers of children admitted to secure units and numbers of days that each child spends in secure units is not available. Information on numbers of children accommodated on 31 March is available but because the numbers are so small, and because of the likely variations in numbers in secure units on each day of the year, this would not produce reliable calculations of average spend per annum per child.

Diabetes

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to receive advice from the UK National Screening Committee on the proposed screening programme for type 2 diabetes. [160346]

Mr. Denham: The United Kingdom national screening committee's proposals for a type 2 diabetes development project were approved on 2 April. Officials are now developing more detailed plans including a specification for the sites, finalised costings and a timetable for the project. The project is being designed to dovetail into existing research projects on screening for type 2 diabetes and should ensure that we have a clear picture of whether or not screening is the most appropriate way to improve identification of this condition. I expect to receive further updates from the UK national screening committee as the work progresses.

Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time is for patients at the Accident and Emergency Unit at Queen Alexandra Hospital, Cosham. [160003]

Ms Stuart: This is day-to-day management information and, as such, is not collected centrally. The information should be available from the chairman of the Portsmouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust.

Royal Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to promote public awareness of the facilities available at the Accident Treatment Centre at the Royal Hospital, Haslar. [160004]

Ms Stuart: An active publicity campaign has been undertaken by Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority and Haslar communications group. The campaign began on 23 April 2001 and will run until June 2001 involving the use of leaflets, articles in the local media and a road show visiting local shopping centres.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 9 May 2001

PRIME MINISTER

Missile Defence Systems

Mr. Maude: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on United States' plans to develop a ballistic missile shield and to seek changes to the ABM treaty. [160633]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answers I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) and to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) in the House on 2 May 2001, *Official Report,* columns 844–46.

NORTHERN IRELAND

IRA Arms Dumps

6. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions IRA arms dumps have been inspected by the international inspectors since 6 May 2000; and if he will make a statement. [159620]

12. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions IRA arms dumps have been inspected by the international inspectors since 6 May 2000; and if he will make a statement. [159627]

Dr. Reid: The two arms inspectors, Martti Ahtisaari and Cyril Ramaphosa, have issued two separate reports on their inspections of IRA arms dumps. On both occasions they reported the dumps held a substantial amount of military material, including explosives and weapons. They remain confident that these weapons and explosives cannot be used without their being aware of it.

Paramilitary Threats

7. **Mr. Grieve:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the threat posed by dissident paramilitary organisations to security in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Great Britain. [159621]

Mr. Ingram: While we believe the main paramilitary groups are maintaining their cease fires there remains a threat from dissidents as evidenced by the recent disruption to the Northern Ireland railway network and the bomb attack on the BBC in London. The security forces are conscious of the threat posed by dissident republicans, and continue to take steps to thwart their attacks.

Security Situation

8. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [159622]

11. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [159626]

Mr. Ingram: The Government believe on balance that the main cease fires are holding. There remains however, a threat from republican dissidents who are opposed to the Good Friday Agreement as evidenced by recent attacks on the railway network in Northern Ireland and the discovery of a Mark 15 barrack buster bomb near Omagh. The security forces are conscious of the threat posed by these groups, and continue to take steps to thwart their attacks.

15. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the requirement for police service and Army force levels in the present security situation. [159630]

Mr. Ingram: Operational security measures are a matter for the Chief Constable and he keeps security at a level appropriate to his assessment of the prevailing threat. As the level of threat changes, this will be reflected in changes to the security force profile.

17. **Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further steps he is taking to create a normal security environment in Northern Ireland. [159632]

25. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further steps he is taking to create a normal security environment in Northern Ireland. [159641]

Mr. Ingram: The Chief Constable recently announced a number of further normalisation measures including the demolition of the six Fermanagh patrol bases, the closure and demolition of Long Kesh army base and the closure of Strand Road Holding Centre. In the longer term, the number of army bases will reduce to no more than 20. Currently the police routinely patrol without military assistance in 28 of the 29 District Command Units. However, on a number of occasions military support has been utilised for specific purposes. Further measures will very much depend on the removal of the threat from dissident republicans and continued progress towards a normal civil society.

Police (Northern Ireland) Act

9. **Mr. Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about progress in implementing the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. [159623]

Mr. Ingram: A number of the provisions in the Police Act have been commenced, some as recently as 30 March. Implementation is being taken forward where possible, including the provisions enabling 50:50 recruitment and those relating to the Oversight Commissioner.

Commencement of a number of the sections and schedules in the Act, however, is dependent on the creation of the Policing Board. The Government want to see a Board established as soon as possible so that the comprehensive programme of change envisaged by the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland can be fully progressed.

Peace Process

10. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process in Northern Ireland. [159625]

13. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Good Friday agreement. [159628]

28. **Mrs. McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process in Northern Ireland. [159644]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Warrington, South (Ms Southworth) and Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Mr. Ennis), *Official Report*, column 99.

19. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions his Department has had with the US Administration concerning their continued role in the peace process. [159635]

Dr. Reid: I met the President's National Security Adviser Dr. Rice and Secretary of State Powell when I was in Washington in March. My officials also keep in touch with the Administration, including through the US Embassy in London to keep them abreast of the current political situation.

20. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his assessment is of the impact of a stable economy on the peace process in Northern Ireland. [159636]

Mr. George Howarth: Northern Ireland now has the fastest growing economy in the United Kingdom and this economic success is directly related to the Belfast Agreement. Seeing and experiencing such tangible benefits helps to maintain support from the business community and the public at large for our continuing efforts to implement the Agreement in full.

Criminal Justice

14. **Dr. George Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in the review of criminal justice in Northern Ireland. [159629]

27. **Mr. Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress on the review of criminal justice in Northern Ireland. [159643]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friends to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) on 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 342W.

Decommissioning

16. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has held with the Taoiseach and the Irish Foreign Minister on matters relating to decommissioning and demilitarisation. [159631]

Dr. Reid: I regularly discuss the security situation, including the decommissioning and normalisation issues in Northern Ireland with the Taoiseach and the Irish Foreign Minister. I last met the Taoiseach on 31 January 2001 and the Irish Foreign Minister on 3 May 2001.

21. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent developments there have been towards arms decommissioning; and if he will make a statement. [159637]

Mr. Ingram: I welcomed the report issued in March by the Decommissioning Commission announcing its re-engagement with the IRA, and look forward to early positive reports from the Commission that progress is being made.

It is vital that all the paramilitary groups on ceasefire fully and actively engage with the Commission so that the issue of illegally held arms can be resolved and decommissioning can occur as soon as possible.

24. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the prospects for achieving arms decommissioning by the June deadline. [159640]

Dr. Reid: I would like to see decommissioning begin as soon as possible and I was encouraged by the report issued by the Decommissioning Commission in March in which it announced its re-engagement with the IRA. Like the Commission, I hope that it will be possible to make substantial progress by the June target date.

Disability Rights Commission

18. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet the Disability Rights Commission to discuss disability rights in Northern Ireland. [159634]

Mr. George Howarth: The Disability Rights Commission's remit does not extend to Northern Ireland and anti-discrimination legislation there is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland deals with disability and other equality issues in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State met with members of the Equality Commission on 24 April to discuss their work on the statutory equality duty set out in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Victims of Violence

22. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps his Department is taking to support the victims of violence in Northern Ireland. [159638]

Mr. Ingram: In 1998 the Victims Liaison Unit was established to implement measures to support victims of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. To date over £18.25 million has been allocated to support victims, and measures including the establishment of a Family Trauma Centre, the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, a review of Criminal Injuries Compensation, and funding for groups working with victims have been introduced. Further measures will be announced in the coming months.

RUC Reforms

23. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress made in the reforms of the RUC. [159639]

Mr. Ingram: The Government are committed to the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland. The Government and the police are pressing on with a wide range of changes to improve the effectiveness of the service and bring it ever closer to the vision set out in the Commission's report.

A representative Policing Board is a key component of the report's proposals and the Government want to see such a board established as soon as possible so that the changes dependent upon its creation can also be progressed.

Drug Trafficking

26. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many RUC officers in each of the last three years have been assigned to combating drug trafficking in Northern Ireland. [159642]

Mr. Ingram: All officers in the Royal Ulster Constabulary are drugs aware and capable of combating drugs trafficking. However, there are dedicated units in the Drugs Squad and in District Command Units, previously in Sub-Divisions.

While figures are not readily available for the number of officers assigned to duties outside the Drugs Squad, over the last three years it has had an approved complement of 44. It is headed by a Detective Superintendent who reports to the Assistant Chief Constable, Crime Department.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have *(a)* been lost and *(b)* disappeared from the system since the introduction of the national dispersal and integration policy. [158801]

Mrs. Roche: If an asylum seeker who is supported by the National Asylum Support Service is found to have left their accommodation, support is withdrawn. We do not, however, keep statistics on the number of such cases.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are located in Essex while awaiting determination of their application or appeal; and what estimate he has made of their total cost to *(a)* central Government and *(b)* local government funds. [159952]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The available information comes from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), which began supporting destitute asylum seekers entering the United Kingdom on or after 3 April 2000. NASS records information on the location of NASS supported asylum seekers by region and cluster area but not by county. Statistics from NASS, for the end of February 2001, show that for asylum seekers located in the east of England (which includes Essex) 40 asylum seekers (including dependants) had been allocated accommodation and 810 asylum seekers (including dependants) had been allocated voucher only support.

These figures may include some asylum seeker families who have received a final negative decision because families of asylum seekers are eligible to remain supported by NASS until removal.

Information is not available centrally on the location of asylum seekers not supported by NASS. Asylum seekers who entered the United Kingdom before 3 April 2000 are supported by local authorities.

Estimated expenditure on asylum support, including unaccompanied asylum seeking minors, in 2000–01 was £751 million (estimated final outturn)

Notes:

1. Information on the costs of supporting asylum seekers in specific areas of the United Kingdom are not available.
2. Figures rounded to the nearest 10.
3. Costs rounded to the nearest £1 million.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on local authority housing services of the maximum 14 day notice period within which people housed under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 must leave their accommodation after they receive a positive decision on their asylum claims; what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues about the Audit Commission's recommendation that this period should be reviewed; and if he will make a statement. [160663]

Mrs. Roche: No ministerial discussions have taken place about the 14 day period laid down in the Asylum Support Regulations 2000 during which asylum seekers remain eligible for National Asylum Support Service (NASS) support. This period was discussed and agreed with the Benefits Agency prior to the implementation of the legislation. However talks are currently taking place between NASS officials, the Benefits Agency and interested voluntary bodies about this period.

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the effect asylum seekers opting for support by voucher only are having on the housing shortage in London. [160794]

Mrs. Roche: No assessment of this sort has been made since where an asylum seeker applies for voucher only support he should already have accommodation, possibly with family or friends, available to him.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected cannot be traced; and if he will make a statement. [159442]

Mrs. Roche: This information has never been collected centrally on a systematic basis, and could be obtained only by a special exercise to examine individual case files at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional financial provision is made for *(a)* health service provision, *(b)* education provision and *(c)* local government services in areas designated as cluster areas for asylum seekers. [159748]

Mrs. Roche: Health authority baseline allocations are intended to cover the health costs of local populations and these include asylum seekers coming into an area. For England, £600 million of additional funding was announced on 28 March 2000, which meant health authorities received average increases of 8.9 per cent. for the financial year 2000–01 (the minimum increase was 8.2 per cent). Separate arrangements apply for Scotland and Wales which each receive a consequential share of funding.

On 30 June 2000 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced that additional funding, up to £500 per pupil, would be available in the financial year 2000–01 to support the educational needs of children of asylum seekers in receipt of support from the National Asylum Support Service who have been dispersed to cluster areas. In 2000–01 a total of £1.3 million was allocated to schools who have received children of asylum seekers.

The grant in England is distributed to local authorities through standard spending assessments which take account of factors such as the size of the population and the number of children needing school places. The grant to a particular local authority will reflect an increase in the size of the population due to asylum seekers moving into that area.

Community Police Officers

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evaluation his Department has made of the impact of community police officers on the number of anti-social behaviour offences. [160294]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Anti-social behaviour offences are not recorded as a separate category, so an evaluation of the effect on them of any specific policing strategy is not possible.

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many community police officers there are in each police area of Greater Manchester; and how many are *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time; [160292]

(2) what measures are in place to increase the number of community police officers in the UK; and what impact they have had on the Greater Manchester area. [160293]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* The information requested for Greater Manchester has been provided by the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester police and is set out in the table.

Greater Manchester police—Community police officers by division

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*
A Division (North Manchester)	52	0	52
C Division (South Manchester)[1]	94	2	96
F Division (Salford)	71	0	71
G Division (Tameside)	38	0	38
J Division (Stockport)	44	2	46
K Division (Bolton)	57	0	57
L Division (Wigan)	59	2	61
M Division (Trafford)	34	2	36
N Division (Bury)	34	2	36
P Division (Rochdale)[1]	34	4	38
Q Division (Oldham)	44	0	44
Total	561	14	575

[1] South Manchester and Rochdale Divisions are considering increasing their numbers of Community Police Officers by two and one respectively

There is no single definition for community policing and many officers carry out some sort of community policing function. The term can cover the assignment of named officers to patrol neighbourhoods, community beat officers and community liaison officers. They are at the forefront of delivering many of our crime reduction policies on the ground, campaigning to reduce burglary and vehicle crime, and gathering intelligence at street level. All these provide visible reassurance and improve the quality of life in the area, not least through reducing the fear of crime among the most vulnerable members of society.

All Chief Constables have agreed that from this year they will report to their constituencies the measures they are taking to increase visibility and accessibility in every ward and parish in their police authority area.

The precise deployment and number of officers for community policing is a matter for the chief officers to decide in accordance with the nature of the areas policed.

I understand from the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester police that Community Police Officers form a key part of the force's operational policing strategy. They are specifically expected to build effective working relationships with key community members through group meetings such as Police Community Consultative Groups and to provide reassurance through high profile foot patrol. Community based police officers should not under ordinary circumstances be diverted away from their normal duties.

Horserace Betting Levy Board

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy that the Horserace Betting Levy Board will not be abolished until alternative funding arrangements are agreed by both the racing industry and the betting industry. [160673]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our stated intention is to abolish the statutory levy on horserace betting, on the basis that commercial agreements between horseracing and other industries, including bookmaking, are capable of producing sufficient income for racing to flourish as a national sport without the need for such a levy. We would expect to see discussions on future funding arrangements make progress, but introduction of the necessary legislation is not conditional on the conclusion of commercial agreements.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding threats to deprive horserace tracks of payments made from Horserace Betting Levy Board money if such tracks sign media rights agreements not agreed by the British Horseracing Board. [160675]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am told we have received no representations on this matter.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if payments to horserace tracks from Horserace Betting Levy Board money can be withdrawn other than by breach of the conditions of these payments. [160674]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The allocation of funds from the levy is a matter for the Horserace Betting Levy Board. However, I understand that the board has not given any consideration to withdrawing payments that have already been agreed.

Tibetans

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department *(a)* when Tibetans were first classed as Chinese nationals for asylum purposes in the UK, *(b)* by which Government Department the decision was taken and *(c)* if Tibetans are classified as Chinese nationals by other EU member states; and if he will make a statement. [160504]

Mrs. Roche: The 1951 Refugee Convention requires that, unless stateless, a person's claim to refugee status be assessed in relation to the country of which they are a national. The United Kingdom does not recognise China's claims of sovereignty over Tibet, but recognises that Tibet is not independent, and Tibetans hold Chinese nationality. This has been the position argued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office since the 1951 annexation of Tibet by China. Further, an individual may claim asylum on the basis of persecution by the Chinese authorities because of their Tibetan ethnicity, but at the time and place of their claimed persecution they are held to be Chinese nationals.

Therefore, the classification of Tibetan in the context of nationality is independent of the consideration of individual asylum claims. This has been the approach adopted in all available United Kingdom asylum statistics. No other European member state classes Tibetans as a separate nationality for asylum purposes.

Police Complaints System

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to ensure that the development of a new police complaints system takes account of the lessons to be learned from Operation Lancet. [160870]

Mr. Straw: We published the Government's proposed framework for a new police complaints system in December 2000. In developing the new arrangements we want to ensure that they are able to deal effectively and robustly with all cases including those where the investigation may be complex and wide-ranging. I have therefore asked Sir John Hoddinott, former Chief Constable of Hampshire, to carry out a review with the following terms of reference.

On behalf of the Home Secretary to conduct a review:

> To consider the functioning of the statutory constitutional arrangements for the investigation of corruption and other serious complaints against the police, including the roles of the Police Complaints Authority and the Crown Prosecution Service;
>
> To consider Operation Lancet as a case study of the way such an investigation is managed strategically and operationally, including as part of the study the process by which decisions were taken during that investigation, and the extent of resources and time used; and
>
> To make recommendations for the future investigation of police complaints.

The review will consider the issues arising from the conduct and management of the investigation and will not re-consider any of the matters of substance which were the subject of the investigation. The review will not consider issues relating to the substance of allegations of misconduct about individuals or any such new allegations.

Sir John Hoddinott will begin work this month.

Police Complaints Authority

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what appointments to the Police Complaints Authority have been made since 1 March. [160871]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have recently appointed Mr. Ian Bynoe to the second position of Deputy Chairman of the authority. His appointment is for two years with effect from 1 May 2001.

Ian Bynoe has served as a member of the authority since 1998, both reviewing investigations and disciplinary proceedings and supervising investigations. He comes from a legal background and, prior to joining the authority, he was a self-employed policy researcher and legal trainer.

Also, I have appointed five new full-time members to the Police Complaints Authority. Their appointments will be for three years. The five new members are:

Name	*Start Date*	*Previous Position*
David Petch	5 March 2001	Ministry of Defence, with attachments to Northern Ireland Office and Cabinet Office
Diane Hughes	2 April 2001	Senior Lecturer in law at Manchester University
Deborah Glass	2 April 2001	Chief Executive of the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation
Susan Swindell	2 April 2001	Senior Crown Prosecutor
Lionel Pilkington	2 April 2001	Senior Crown Prosecutor

Child Protection

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the aims and objectives are of the new task force on child protection on the internet; and if he will make a statement. [160688]

Mr. Straw: I met representatives from the industry involved in providing internet services in the United Kingdom, children's charities, law enforcement agencies and others on 28 March 2001, where it was agreed to form a Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet.

The task force is a partnership of representatives from: internet service providers (ISP); retailers and manufacturers; children's charities; representatives from the main opposition parties; law enforcement agencies; and academics. It has the following aims and objectives:

Aims:

> To make the United Kingdom the best and safest place in the world for children to use the internet; and to help protect children the world over from abuse fuelled by criminal misuse of new technologies.

Objectives:

Building on current good practice, for industry involved in providing internet services in the United Kingdom to promote ethical business standards across the industry;

Building on existing co-operation, for law enforcement agencies and industry involved in providing internet services in the United Kingdom to work together to develop effective procedures to prevent, detect and investigate crime on the Internet;

For the Government to ensure that the law properly covers criminal activity on the internet; and to consider in co-operation with the industry involved in providing internet services in the United Kingdom, the structure of co-regulation for the industry and whether it needs to be strengthened;

Building on the recommendations of the Internet Crime Forum in their report 'Chatwise Streetwise' for the industry involved in providing internet services in the United Kingdom to offer services with effective safeguards for children.

The work will be underpinned by a new public awareness campaign later this year and by Government and industry leadership in international initiatives in the European Union and more widely.

I have today placed a copy of the full aims and objectives and list of organisations represented on the task force in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sudan

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will apply greater pressure on the authorities in Khartoum to improve their human rights record. [160243]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 126W.

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the arrest of Christians in Khartoum on 10 April and their treatment by riot police; and if he will make a statement. [160145]

Mr. Wilson: We received a number of reports of the events on 10 April from our Embassy in Khartoum and Church organisations both within and outside Sudan. Our Ambassador in Khartoum has expressed our concerns to the Government of Sudan. We shall follow the Government's actions on the events in Green Square and at the Episcopal Cathedral, and on freedom of religious expression in general.

Pakistan

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Pakistani Government concerning the persecution of members of the Ahmadiyya Islamic Movement. [160625]

Mr. Wilson: On 3 April, the Under-Secretary, my noble Friend Baroness Scotland, met the Pakistani Attorney General and Minister of Law, Justice and Human Rights, Ms Shahida Jamil, and reiterated our concerns about the position of the Ahmadi communities in Pakistan and allegations of their persecution under Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Trainee Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of trainee teachers left before completing their course in each year from 1992–93 to 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [157514]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Information about the proportion of trainee teachers who leave a teacher training course before completing is not collected centrally.

Vocational A-levels

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the failure rate by those taking vocational A-level assessments. [158247]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* We are committed to ensuring that the new vocational A-level is as rigorous as the GCE A-level. However, responsibility for assessing the standards of qualifications rests with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and with the awarding body. QCA is meeting with all awarding bodies to review the outcome of the assessments and consider whether there are lessons to be learned.

Education and Youth European Council

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the issues raised at the 9 November Education and Youth European Council, pertaining to *(a)* the Social Agenda, *(b)* the Blois seminar, Learn the History of Europe, *(c)* Young People and Europe, *(d)* the Youth Programme, *(e)* Social Inclusion of Young People and *(f)* measures to combat racism in the young; and if he will list the documents concerned and place them in the Library. [158751]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* The outcome of the Education and Youth Council was reported in the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills) on 14 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 601W. In respect of the particular issues the hon. Member raises, further information is as follows:

a) The Social Agenda: the Council adopted an opinion on "the Social Policy Agenda" to forward to the Employment and Social Policy Council. This opinion welcomed, inter alia, that the Social Policy Agenda accepted the role of education and lifelong learning in the preparation and adaptation of the labour market. An Explanatory Memorandum on the European Social Agenda was deposited in the Library on 19 December 2000;

b) The Blois seminar: this item was included on the agenda as an information point. The Council was informed by the Presidency of the outcome of the seminar held in Blois from 13 to 15 October 2000 on the topic "learning the history of Europe". No discussion took place;

c) Young People and Europe: an open debate, as part of the Commission's consultation process to develop a White Paper on the future youth policy. The Council agreed the importance of involving young people at European level and the need to create opportunities to consult with young people at national and European level;

d) The Youth Programme: the Commission informed the Council of the adoption and implementation of the Youth Programme to run for seven years from 2000 to 2006. The Council Decision establishing the Youth Community Action Programme was recorded in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L117, of 18 May 2000;

e) Social Inclusion of Young People: the Council adopted a resolution that recognised the distinctive position of young people. It encouraged member states to develop young people's social inclusion and to improve their social and economic situation. The Council Resolution was recorded in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, C374, of the 28 December 2000;

f) Measures to combat racism in the young: the Council took note of a German statement on the need to tackle the problem of racism and xenophobia among young people.

Depositable papers were not available for those items without listed documents.

Schools (Ministerial Communications)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* consultation documents, *(b)* regulations, *(c)* revised and corrected regulations, *(d)* guidance notes, *(e)* requests for statistical information and *(f)* letters from Ministers have been sent to schools by his Department since May 1997. [158920]

Jacqui Smith: In my reply to the hon. Member on 19 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 563W, I gave the number of mailings for the years 1996 to mid 2000. The tables cover mailings to primary schools and mailings to secondary schools in the whole of the year 2000 and in the year 2001 up to 2 May. Since September 2000, we have had a presumption against sending materials direct to schools. Instead most information is available on request.

Primary schools

Topic	*2000*	*2001 to 2 May 2001*
Consultation Papers[1]		
School Finance	1	0
School Standards	0	1
Guidance		
Early Years	1	0
Literacy and Numeracy	6	3
School Curriculum	11	1
School Discipline	1	1
School Finance	2	1
School Governance	2	2
School Health and Safety	3	1
School Organisation	1	2
School Premises	1	0
School Standards	1	1
Special Education	3	0
Teaching Profession	22	2
Data collection		
Early Years	3	1
Class size	2	1
School Discipline	2	2
School Finance	0	2
School Standards	9	9
Special education	1	1
Teaching Profession	1	1
Letters from Ministers		
To primary schools	7	2

[1] In general DfEE now only consults a sample of schools, usually 10 per cent.

Secondary schools

Topic	*2000*	*2001 to 2 May 2001*
Consultation Papers[1]		
School Finance	1	0
School Standards	0	1
Guidance		
Literacy and Numeracy	1	3
School Curriculum	14	1
School Discipline	1	1
School Finance	2	1
School Governance	2	2
School Health and Safety	3	1
School Organisation	1	2
School Premises	1	0
School Standards	1	1
Special Education	3	0
Teaching Profession	22	2
Data collection		
Class size	1	1
School Discipline	2	2
School Finance	0	2
School Standards	9	9
Special education	1	1
Teaching Profession	1	1
Letters from Ministers		
To secondary schools	6	3

[1] In general DfEE now only consults a sample of schools, usually 10 per cent.

Note:

Regulations are not sent to schools

Advertising

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the amount his Department has spent on advertising *(a)* between December 2000 to May 2001 and *(b)* between May to October 1997. [158998]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The role of advertising is to make the general public aware of the opportunities available to them for example in employment, training or education, to enable them to fulfil their potential.

During the period May to October 1997 the DfEE spend on advertising was nil. During this period the Department was developing its policies.

During the period December 2000 to May 2001 the total DfEE spend on advertising was £14,755,321. This reflects the DfEE's need to communicate to a diverse and broad range of target audiences what the Department's policies mean to them.

The campaigns include:

Individual Learning Accounts—To encourage people to take up Individual Learning Accounts to improve their career prospects (£568,777).

Childcare—A successful campaign to recruit more childcare workers and inform parents of local childcare provision (£1,775,475).

Disability—Raising disability awareness (including getting small business to take practical steps to help disabled customers) (£1,899,447).

Fast Track Teachers—To inform potential recruits about the fast-track teachers scheme (£1,400,009).

Science Year—To encourage more interest in science among young people (£1,509,643).

Training and Jobs—To promote a range of training and jobs programmes, including apprenticeships for young people and jobs for the over 50s (£694,532).

UK online centres—Encouraging adults to gain computer skills (£3,238,739).

Millennium Volunteers—To raise awareness among young people about the benefits of volunteering in the community and stimulate recruitment (£615,341).

Learning Journey—Campaign to get parents more involved in their children's education (£1,700,000).

Widening Access to Higher Education—Letting young people know about university opportunities (£1,314,403).

Medical Schools

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places in English medical schools were allocated to overseas students in each of the last three years; and what percentage of the total this represents. [157905]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The available data are shown in the table.

Intake numbers of pre-clinical medical students in Higher Education Institutions in England by domicile (Thousands)

	UK	*Overseas*	*Total*
1997–98			
Number	3,438	311	3,749
Percentage	91.7	8.3	100.0
1998–99			
Number	3,389	346	3,735
Percentage	90.7	9.3	100.00
1999–2000			
Number	3,650	322	3,972
Percentage	91.8	8.1	100.0

Tuition Fees

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of higher education students are not paying tuition fees in *(a)* London and *(b)* English universities and higher education establishments. [159613]

Mr. Wicks: In England and Wales, students on undergraduate courses and their families are expected to make a contribution towards their tuition fees only if they can afford to do so.

In academic year 1999–2000, the latest year for which data are available, for students who are normally domiciled in London as a whole (studying in the UK), the proportion of students who are liable for fees under the Education (Student Support) Regulations and who do not have to pay a contribution towards their fees is estimated to be 58 per cent. For students normally domiciled in England (studying in the UK) this figure is estimated to be 45 per cent.

Individual Learning Accounts

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to increase the amount of funding available for training through individual learning accounts. [160304]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Spending plans for individual learning accounts for the next three years show a marked increase from the £42 million in financial year 2000–01. The figures are as follows: £46.6 million (2001–02) £72 million (2002–03) and £71.2 million in 2003–04.

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* used an individual learning account, broken down by (i) gender, (ii) occupation and (iii) the nature of learning scheme taken up. [160303]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Latest figures are that over one million people have opened individual learning accounts (ILAs) in the UK. This is a remarkable achievement and means that our manifesto commitment to open one million accounts across the UK by March 2002 has been met almost 12 months early. The one million figure includes over 200,000 opened during the pilot phase which preceded the introduction of the national framework to administer ILAs.

Since the launch of the national framework to administer ILAs in June 2000, almost one million people have inquired about ILA membership in England, 785,379 people have opened an account and 346,559 (44 per cent.) have already made use of their ILA to support a course of learning.

Of the 785,379 who have opened an account, 459,782 are women and 322,674 are men. Of the 346,559 who have already made use of their account, 203,124 are women and 142,177 are men.

Over half of the learning is IT related with Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) and European Computer Driving Licence being the most popular courses. A wide variety of non-IT, non-recreational learning makes up the balance. A breakdown of the accounts opened and accounts used by occupation is given in the following table:

Accounts opened by occupation

Occupation	*ILAs*
Housewife/Homemaker	67,290
Manual/Factory Worker	41,745
Manager (own business less than 250 staff)	27,170
Office/Retail Worker	145,795
Senior Manager/Professional	79,576
Skilled Worker/Tradesperson	62,000
Teaching/Lecturer	37,087
Data not supplied	173,403
Other	151,313
Total	785,379

Accounts used by occupation

Occupation	*ILAs*
Housewife/Homemaker	33,730
Manual/Factory Worker	19,233
Manager (own business less than 250 staff)	12,149
Office/Retail Worker	65,234
Senior Manager/Professional	33,330
Skilled Worker/Tradesperson	27,943
Teaching/Lecturer	15,253
Data not supplied	70,626
Other	69,061
Total	346,559

Day Care for Childminding

Mr. Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will publish the national standards for day care and childminding following the consultation on draft standards last year. [160944]

Ms Hodge: The national standards for under eights day care and childminding are being published today, and I am placing copies in the Library.

Work-focused Interviews

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals he has to extend the use of work-focused interviews for working-age claimants to benefits. [160874]

Mr. Blunkett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security and I are establishing, later this year, Jobcentre Plus, an Agency for people of working age. This will bring together labour market and benefit services for people of working age and enable us to provide a more integrated approach for our customers.

As we announced on 14 March this year, as a first stage in the launch of Jobcentre Plus, we will be introducing around 50 Pathfinder offices. Additionally, we will be introducing work-focused interviews for everyone of working age making a claim to benefit in around a further 40 offices to the same time scale. A provisional list of the locations in which these offices are based is set out in the table. People of working age making a claim for benefit in these offices will be required to participate in a work-focused interview as an integral part of the benefit claims process and will be offered specialist support to help them into work. My right hon. Friend will shortly be laying regulations under the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 for this purpose.

Jobcentre Plus work focused interview sites (city/town):

City of Aberdeen

Livingston

Bridgend

Telford

Wallasey

Manchester Openshaw

City of Derby

Gateshead

Essex.

GCSEs (Shropshire)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the pass rates for GCSE examinations for pupils in Shropshire for each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [160519]

Mr. Wicks: The pass rates for GCSE examinations for pupils in Shropshire who gained at least one GCSE (or GNVQ equivalent) at grade G or above since 1997 are shown in the table.

	Percentage
1997–98	97.5
1998–99	97.3
1999–2000	97.0

Sure Start (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the Sure Start Programme in Shrewsbury and Atcham. [160516]

Yvette Cooper: There are no Sure Start programmes operating in the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency.

Our aim is to establish 500 programmes in areas of disadvantage by 2003–04. To date, 260 programmes have been announced. Further programmes will be announced later this year.

Districts are invited to submit plans for a Sure Start programme because collectively they have high levels of need and disadvantage, according to the DETR Index of Multiple Deprivation, and give a good spread between different types of area around the country.

We will also be looking at ways that Sure Start can reach young children in areas with smaller pockets of deprivation.

Education Spending (Reading, West)

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much the Government spent on education in the Reading, West constituency in each of the financial years from 1995–96 to 2000–01, indicating the specific areas on which the funding has been spent. [159614]

Ms Estelle Morris: Most funding provided by the Department is distributed via local education authorities. Total Devolved Formula Capital allocations for schools in the Reading, West constituency amounted to £708,500 in 2000–01. Allocations between the years 1997–98 and 2000–01 under the New Deal for Schools scheme are set out in the table. The Department does not hold information on other support provided to Reading, West constituency schools since 1995–96. The Secretary of State wrote to my hon. Friend on 16 February setting out the total funding for his local education authorities (Reading and West Berkshire) for the years 1998–99 to 2001–02. Due to local government reorganisation, figures are not available for earlier years.

New Deal for Schools (NDS): Allocations to schools in the Reading, West constituency

School	*Project details*	*Grant awarded (£)*
1997–98		
LEA wide package including:		
English Martyrs RC Primary	Urgent health and safety work	[1]761,000
Downsway Primary		
St. Edward's School		
Birch Copse		
1998–99		
Thamesbridge College (formerly Ashmead School)	Replacement of unusable teaching accommodation	2,279,825
LEA wide package involving 12 schools	Plumbing work	[2]136,700
LEA wide package involving 16 schools	Repairs to roofs	[2]252,900
1999–2000		
Little Heath School	Roof Covering Replacement	107,030
The Holy Brook School	Window Replacement	24,310
2000–01		
Brookfields Special School	Replacement of temporary classroom	60,000
Upcroft Primary School	Reorganising and extending school building	272,550
Included within a 15 school package:		
Kennett Valley Primary	Fire alarms/means of escape	[3]273,216
Calcot Infant and Nursery		
Included within a 3 school package:		
Kennett Valley Primary	Internal remodelling	[3]217,925

[1] Local education authorities (LEAs) were not required to specify individual project costs for phase 1 of the NDS programme, so the amount shown is the total allocation in that year to the former Berkshire LEA. Reading LEA (English Martyrs RC Primary and St. Edward's School) and West Berkshire LEA (Downsway Primary and Birch Copse) hold project level information.

[2] Denotes LEA wide package; details of specific schools within the package are not available. West Berkshire local education authority will be able to advise if schools from the Reading, West constituency benefited.

[3] Denotes total allocation made to package projects covering more than one school. West Berkshire local education authority will be able to advise the value of projects at schools which have benefited from these allocations.

Between 1992–93 and 1997–98, average recurrent funding per pupil fell nationally by £120 in real terms from £2,830 to £2,710. Since then, it has risen by an average of £540 in real terms to £3,250 this year. By 2003–04, it will have increased by around £750 in real terms since 1997–98.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Work-focused Interviews

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to extend the use of work-focused interviews for working age claimants to benefits. [160873]

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and I are establishing, later this year, Jobcentre Plus, an Agency for people of working age. This will bring together labour market and benefit services for people of working age and enable us to provide a more integrated approach for our customers.

As we announced on 14 March this year, as the first stage in the launch of Jobcentre Plus, we will be introducing around 50 Pathfinder offices. Additionally, we will be introducing work-focused interviews for everyone of working age making a claim to benefit in around a further 40 offices to the same time scale. A provisional list of the locations in which these offices are based is set out in the table. People of working age making a claim for benefit in these offices will be required to participate in a work-focused interview as an integral part of the benefit claims process and will be offered specialist support to help them into work. I will shortly by laying regulations under the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 for this purpose.

Jobcentre Plus Work Focused Interview Sites

City of Aberdeen
Livingston
Bridgend
Telford
Wallasey
Manchester Openshaw
City of Derby
Gateshead
Essex.

Pensioners

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his written answer to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 15 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 716W, if he will update his estimates of the number of pensioner units with an income of *(a)* under £50, *(b)* £50 to £99, *(c)* £100 to £149, *(d)* £150 to £199, *(e)* £200 to £210, *(f)* £211 to £221 and *(g)* £221 and above who are in receipt of (i) Housing Benefit, (ii) Council Tax Benefit, (iii) Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit and (iv) one or more of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. [160872]

Mr. Rooker: The information is in the tables.

Pensioners in Great Britain in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit by amount of income (excluding Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit amounts)—May 1999

Total income	*Housing Benefit for Great Britain*	*Council Tax Benefit for Great Britain*	*Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for Great Britain*	*Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit for Great Britain*
All Cases	1,769,000	2,542,000	1,640,000	2,670,000
Under £50	162,000	204,000	150,000	220,000
£50-£99	720,000	1,042,000	690,000	1,070,000
£100-£149	628,000	895,000	570,000	960,000
£150-£199	187,000	288,000	170,000	300,000
£200-£210	19,000	30,000	20,000	30,000
£211-£220	12,000	21,000	10,000	20,000
£221 and above	40,000	62,000	40,000	70,000

Pensioners in Great Britain in receipt of Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit by amount of income (including Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit amounts)—May 1999

Total income	*Housing Benefit for Great Britain*	*Council Tax Benefit for Great Britain*	*Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for Great Britain*	*Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit for Great Britain*
All cases	1,769,000	2,542,000	1,640,000	2,670,000
Under £50	36,000	79,000	30,000	90,000
£50-£99	130,000	438,000	120,000	450,000
£100-£149	821,000	1,097,000	760,000	1,150,000
£150-£199	536,000	642,000	500,000	680,000
£200-£210	61,000	69,000	60,000	70,000
£211-£220	42,000	50,000	40,000	50,000
£221 and above	142,000	167,000	130,000	180,000

Notes:

1. All income that has been used is the income prior to any subtraction of disregards, except for earned income, which is all net income.
2. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
3. The figures for cases in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit have been rounded to the nearest thousand, however due to the estimation procedure to produce the figures for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, or Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Benefit, these figures need to be rounded to the nearest ten thousand due to the collection procedures in Scotland.
4. Pensioners have been identified by either the claimant or the partner being aged 60 and over.
5. In the first table, the bands of income have been reached by looking at the total income excluding any housing benefit or council tax benefit but including income assumed from any savings.
6. In the second table, the bands of income have been reached by looking at the total income including any housing benefit or council tax benefit as well as any income assumed from any savings.
7. The totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample, taken in May 1999.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much additional expenditure on pensioners there has been since May 1997 over and above the cost of annually uprating the state pension in line with prices. [160640]

Mr. Rooker: Including forecast expenditure for the current year, the Government will have spent an additional £8.9 billion on new measures over and above inflation increases in the state pension since April 1997.

Roland Riggs

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Putney will receive a reply to his letter of 17 April about the reclaiming of benefit from the war disablement pension of his constituent, Mr. Roland Riggs. [160527]

Mr. Bayley: An initial reply was sent on 8 May 2001 to my hon. Friend's letter of 17 April 2001, on behalf of Mr. Roland Riggs, and I expect to follow this up with a full reply as soon as possible.

Mrs. Mary McCreadie Harrison

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will reply to the letter of 29 March, from Mrs. Mary McCreadie Harrison, a constituent, concerning her pension entitlement. [160789]

Mr. Rooker: A reply was issued on 4 May 2001.

Child Support Agency

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the *(a)* earliest and *(b)* latest date is on which the new CSA rules will be applied to existing CSA cases; and if he will make a statement on how the new CSA arrangements will be phased in for existing cases. [160683]

Angela Eagle: The new child support scheme will be introduced for new cases by April 2002. Existing cases will be moved on to the new scheme when it is seen to be working well and maintenance is being paid regularly and reliably to new cases.

To give parents who have existing child support assessments time to adjust to the new amounts, child support liability will be phased over a period of five years and in stages of £2.50, £5 or £10, depending on the non-resident parent's net weekly income.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

GM Crops

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations were held with *(a)* the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, *(b)* the Wild Life Trust West Wales, *(c)* Pembrokeshire county council and *(d)* the National Assembly for Wales on environmental sensitivity, prior to a decision being made to allow genetically modified farm scale trials to go ahead at Mathry, Pembrokeshire. [157570]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* No consultations on environmental sensitivity were held with the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the Wild Life Trust West Wales, Pembrokeshire county council or the National Assembly for Wales, prior to a decision being made to propose genetically modified farm scale evaluations at Mathry, Pembrokeshire.

The genetically modified (GM) maize to be grown at Mathry has European Union wide approval for unrestricted cultivation. The fields at Mathry were offered by Aventis CropScience on behalf of the industry body SCIMAC and selected by the research consortium undertaking the evaluations in accordance with the criteria set by the independent committee of scientists overseeing the Farm Scale Evaluations. It is not a decision Ministers take. As soon as DETR officials were notified of the site locations by SCIMAC they informed National Assembly officials about the three sites in Wales. DETR issued a press release on 3 April listing the proposed sites and on the same day also wrote to Pembrokeshire county council and the local community council to inform them of the sites and to provide information about the Farm Scale Evaluation programme. This received extensive local and Welsh media coverage. DETR officials and experts were then available to discuss any environmental concerns arising from the proposed evaluation in Mathry.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what environmental impact assessments have been carried out on the proposed genetically modified farm scale trial sites at Mathry, Pembrokeshire, before the decision to grant a licence was made. [157568]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The genetically modified (GM) maize to be grown in the Farm Scale Evaluations at Mathry has been subject to detailed risk assessments as part of the requirement for its authorisation under EU Directive 90–220, which controls releases of GM organisms. These risk assessments showed that it could safely be cultivated anywhere within the EU. Accordingly it was granted consent for commercial cultivation in 1998. This consent applies throughout the European Union. Directive 90–220 requires that the use of GM crops with commercial approval may not be prohibited or impeded except on sound scientific grounds, in particular, risks to human health or the environment. Any such action would need to be agreed by other Member States. This is in keeping with such crops having passed a robust risk assessment at EU level and being assessed as safe for use. No additional environmental impact assessment is therefore required under EU legislation. Equally there is nothing to prevent such an assessment being carried out, though none in practice has.

Green Belt/greenfield Development

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the locations of each development on *(a)* green belt land and *(b)* non-green belt greenfield land that he has given planning permission for since 1 May 1997. [158709]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The locations of the 119 sites where the Secretary of State has approved development in the green belt are set out in a table which has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Sixty six per cent. of these sites involved the use of previously developed land and the conversion of existing buildings. The total area of the sites on which approval was given equates to 0.08 per cent. of the total area of green belt in England. In the same period, the Secretary of State refused development on 132 sites in the green belt.

Information on non-green belt greenfield sites is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Foot and Mouth (Financial Assistance)

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money central Government had paid out by 26 April under the matched funding scheme for public donations to foot and mouth relief. [159939]

Mr. Meacher: Up until the 26 April, the Countryside Agency, which is implementing the Government's commitment to match donations from the public to help alleviate hardship as a result of the foot and mouth disease, had made payment of one grant worth £52,000 to the Hadfield Trust in Cumbria.

On Friday 4 May the Countryside Agency announced details of three further charities that had been awarded funding worth almost £1.5 million under the scheme. The ARC-Addington Fund will receive match funding of £1 million, the Rural Stress Information Network will receive £332,000 and the Cumbrian Community Foundation will receive £91,843.

The Countryside Agency continues to receive applications for match funding which it aims to turn around as quickly as possible.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for the relaxation of pollution control regulations in relation to *(a)* open burning of slaughtered livestock carcases and *(b)* tyres used to aid combustion; and if he will make a statement. [159854]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* There is a continuing dialogue between various Government Departments, and with the Environment Agency, about options for the disposal of carcases.

In order to expedite the burning of animal carcases resulting from the foot and mouth crisis, we have made regulations—The Pollution Prevention and Control (Foot-and-Mouth Disease) (Air Curtain Incinerators) (England and Wales) Regulations 2001, SI 2001–1623)—which came into force on Tuesday 1 May 2001, allowing the permitting of air curtain incinerators for this purpose, which can be preferable to the use of pyres.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would not generally sanction the use of tyres to aid combustion, and has made no representations to my Department on this matter.

Sellafield

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has commissioned on the technical modifications necessary to the Sellafield MOX plant to enable the plant to process plutonium for immobilisation. [159781]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* My Department has not commissioned any research on this subject. We are aware of the recent report by Fred Barker and Mike Sadnicki, "The Disposition of Civil Plutonium in the UK", which, among other things, identifies some modifications which could enable the plant to dispose of plutonium through a process of immobilisation.

Railtrack

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the *(a)* allocated and *(b)* forecast level of public funding to Railtrack is in each of the next three years. [160297]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Railtrack will receive network grants from the Strategic Rail Authority. While the precise amounts will depend on future movements in the retail prices index, payments are expected to be as follows:

	£ million
2001–02	505
2002–03	900
2003–04	2,005

In addition, Railtrack will receive some £2 billion each year in revenue from passenger train operators, the large majority of whom receive subsidy from the Strategic Rail Authority and passenger transport executives.

Additionally, in 2003–04 network grants to Railtrack will be increased by an adjustment for freight access income. This will consist of one third of the difference between the total amount of freight income allowed for in the second regulatory control period in the Regulator's final conclusions on passenger access charges and that to emerge from the Regulator's freight charging review.

Wild Birds

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to ensure that the Government comply with Article 9.1(c) of Council Directive (79/409/EEC) on the conservation of wild birds with respect to the possession of live and dead birds; and what measures are taken to differentiate between those birds of captive origin and those which are not. [160631]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which implements Council Directive (79/409/EEC) in Great Britain, protects all wild birds. Captive-bred birds are not covered by the provisions of the Directive, although they are covered by certain provisions of the 1981 Act. It is an offence under section 1 of the Act to possess any live or dead wild bird, or derivative of such a bird. Section 1 also includes a defence if the possessor of such a bird can show that it had either been legally taken from the wild or that it was captive bred. Ultimately, only the courts can definitively interpret the legislation and decide whether this defence is met in any individual case.

Section 16 of the 1981 Act implements Article 9 of the Directive and provides for licences to be issued derogating from the protection afforded to birds for certain purposes.

Transport White Paper

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he has issued on the selection of options in multi-model shares and their consistency with the Transport White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone". [160526]

Mr. Hill: I assume my hon. Friend is referring to multi-modal studies. My Department issued Guidance on the Methodology for Multi-Modal Studies (GOMMMS) in March 2000. This develops the new approach to appraisal that was introduced in the White Paper into a fully multi-modal appraisal framework.

The framework covers the identification and assessment of problems, the identification of options, and the assessment of those options against the five objectives of environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration which were set out in the Transport White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone".

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the number of homeless acceptances resulting from the termination of support by NASS following a positive decision on claims for asylum; what future plans he has to monitor the number of households who are accepted as homeless in these circumstances; and if he will make a statement. [160660]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: These figures are not recorded and we have no current plans to do so.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the support needs of homeless refugees and those given exceptional leave to remain in the UK once they have been given a positive decision on their asylum claims; what guidance will be given to local authorities in this area under the proposed new duty on local housing authorities to produce homelessness strategies set out in the Homes Bill; and if he will make a statement. [160662]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Local authorities must consider the support needs of all homeless client groups, including refugees.

Guidance on strategies will encourage local authorities to consider the support needs of all homeless client groups, including refugees.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance is available to local authorities about the needs of refugees who are *(a)* victims of rape or torture and *(b)* suffering from post-traumatic stress; what plans he has to ensure that local housing authorities consider such needs in assessing whether a person is in priority need under the homelessness legislation; and if he will make a statement. [160661]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Code of Guidance on Parts 6 and 7 of the Housing Act 1996 requires local authorities to consider whether eligible applicants for social housing are vulnerable as a result of having suffered harassment or violence. Where this is the case, the applicant will have a priority need for accommodation, regardless of his or her background.

Capital Projects (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list capital projects in Shrewsbury and Atcham since 1997 aimed at improving the environment; and if he will make a statement. [160520]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The table sets out figures for funding provided by DETR to Shrewsbury and Atcham council since 1997, both for all capital purposes, which could include environmental expenditure, as well as for specific capital projects for improving the environment. Returns to the Department also indicate that, between 1997–98 and 1999–2000, Shrewsbury and Atcham council raised around £3 million of usable capital receipts from the sale of assets, which they would have been able to use for any capital purpose, including environmental expenditure, depending on local needs and priorities.

	£000
Basic Credit Approvals[1]	
1996–97	649
1997–98	342
1998–99	276
1999–2000	431
2000–01	2,052
2001–02	518
Supplementary Credit Approvals[2] for contaminated land	
1996–97	
Spring Gardens, Shrewsbury	26
Capital grant	
2000–03	
Renovation of Flaxmill and former malt kiln	2,800

[1] Basic Credit Approvals are issued annually to all local authorities in England and may be used for any kind of capital expenditure.

[2] Supplementary Credit Approvals are normally issued for specific types of expenditure.

Flood Emergency Works

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to review the Bellwin rates to allow local authorities to claim for increased expenditure on flood emergency works. [160513]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Following the floods that were experienced between October and December 2000 my Department is reviewing the operation of the Bellwin scheme in co-operation with the Local Government Association.

A "Bellwin" scheme of emergency financial assistance may be activated to help a local authority with uninsurable clear-up costs following a disaster or emergency that involves destruction of, or danger to, life or property. Grant is normally paid at a rate of 85 per cent. of an authority's qualifying expenditure above a threshold. The threshold is the provision that a prudent authority might reasonably be expected to make for contingencies and emergencies (approximately 0.2 per cent. of its revenue budget).

For the flooding Bellwin scheme grant was paid at a rate of 100 per cent. above the threshold to take into account the exceptional nature of the emergency. Bellwin grant is paid only in respect of current expenditure; capital expenditure is not eligible for grant.

Issues such as future funding will be considered as part of the review. There is also a separate review of flood defence funding.

Aerodromes (Security)

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if his Department will incorporate the text of paragraph 9 to the annexe to Circular 2/92 in the final wording of the paper "Safeguarding Aerodromes, Technical Sites and Military Explosives Storage Areas"; and if he will make a statement; [160710]

(2) what measures his Department proposes to take to ensure the continued protection of *(a)* gliding sites and *(b)* other unlicensed aerodromes provided for in paragraph 9 of the annexe to Circular 2/92; and if he will make a statement; [160709]

(3) what plans his Department has to change its policy on the unofficial safeguarding of gliding sites; and if he will make a statement. [160708]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: My Department is currently conducting a public consultation on a proposal to revise Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions Circular 2/92 on the safeguarding of aerodromes, technical sites and military explosives storage areas. The existing circular is concerned mainly with the role of local planning authorities in official safeguarding, but it also recommends a form of unofficial safeguarding to operators of other aerodromes and of gliding sites. No change of policy is proposed on the unofficial safeguarding of these other aerodromes or of gliding sites. But we envisage that instead of this brief reference in a departmental circular there will be a specific safeguarding publication to be issued by the Civil Aviation Authority. This will be addressed in particular to aerodromes licensed by the authority, but the advice will also be relevant to the operators of unlicensed aerodromes and of gliding sites. We will consider, in our further work on the revision of the circular, whether we should complement the Authority's advice with a recommendation to local planning authorities.

Commercial Property Leasing

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will make an announcement on the action he will take on the voluntary code of practice on commercial property leasing. [160619]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 5–6W.

National Bus Company

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the distribution of the National Bus Company pensions settlement. [160869]

Mr. Hill: I am very pleased to say that I have been informed by the National Bus Company pension trustees that the representative beneficiaries have now reached an agreement which will enable the trustees to formulate their proposals for the final distribution of the settlement. This agreement removes a major impediment to further early progress.

Court approval will be necessary for the representative beneficiaries' agreement and for the trustees' proposals. I understand that beneficiaries will be given an opportunity to express their views prior to this approval being sought. The trustees and the representative beneficiaries will be issuing an information bulletin in this regard very shortly.

The trustees' aim is to obtain the court's approval this summer which should mean that the distribution will be very largely completed this autumn.

I urge all the parties involved to ensure that this latest very positive progress is continued over the next few months and we will remain in close touch with developments.

Rights of Way

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will make regulations under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in relation to access land, rights of way and local access forums. [160946]

Mr. Meacher: We have issued a consultation paper on proposals for regulations under section 11 of the Act to enable the Countryside Agency to prepare draft maps of open country and registered common land. The closing date for comments is 20 June and we expect to lay regulations before the summer recess. At that time we would expect to consult on a framework for regulations under section 94 of the Act relating to the establishment of local access forums with a view to laying regulations in the autumn. Before the end of the year we propose to consult on regulations relating to the issue of provisional maps of open country and appeals against them with a view to laying regulations early in 2002. We shall also be consulting on regulations relating to exclusions and restrictions under Chapter II of the Act and dedication of land for access under section 16. We would hope to lay such regulations in the first half of 2002. Consultations on the remaining regulations under Part I will follow.

Certain of the rights of way provisions in Part II of the Act are already in force, for example the power to order removal of an obstruction under section 64. However the provisions of Part II are complex and there is much work to be done in producing the required regulations. We shall wish to consult before making many of the regulations, which adds to difficulty in providing specific timings. We are committed to improving the rights of way network as soon as possible and are focusing on a number of key issues to achieve this. Guidance on rights of way improvement plans and further provisions to aid the speedy removal of obstructions will be dealt with as a priority and we would hope to have these in force before the end of this year. Other aspects of Part II will be dealt with as quickly as possible over the next two years.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Listed Buildings

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list those Grade I listed buildings whose façade has had to be compromised by reason of the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive; what procedures are followed by way of consultation between the HSE and conservation bodies to resolve such issues; and if he will make a statement. [R] [159577]

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information is not available. Any such issues would need to be considered on a case by case basis, taking account of the statutory requirement to obtain listed building consent for any works which would affect the character of the building concerned. English Heritage is a statutory consultee in this process.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria are used when deciding whether to list a building. [160307]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 8 May 2001]*: When deciding whether to list buildings, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regard to the statutory criteria set out in section 1 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1979, and to the criteria contained in section 6 of the Government's Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received concerning listing buildings in Redbridge. [160308]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 8 May 2001]*: My right hon. Friend is currently considering requests to list two buildings in the Redbridge area—the Odeon Cinema, Gants Hill and Wanstead Police Station. He has asked English Heritage, his statutory adviser on the historic environment, to assess these buildings and will carefully consider its advice and any other available evidence before making his decisions. Since 1994, the Department has been asked to consider 19 buildings in the Redbridge area for inclusion on the statutory list, and of these nine have been listed.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received concerning listed status for the Odeon Cinema, Gants Hill. [160309]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 8 May 2001]*: My right hon. Friend has received a request to consider this cinema for inclusion in the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. He has asked English Heritage, his statutory adviser on these matters, to assess the building and will carefully consider its advice and any other available evidence before making his decision.

Community Fund Grants

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average length of time is for a decision to be made on applications from organisations in the Greater Manchester area for funding from the Community Fund. [160300]

Kate Hoey *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* This information is not available for Greater Manchester. For the United Kingdom, the average time for a decision to be made depends on which grant programme an applicant applies to. For the Awards for All programme, for grants up to £5,000, it takes an average of two months and a maximum of three months. For the main grants programme, the average is approximately three months for a decision with a maximum of five months. The longer time scale is needed for more complex projects.

Manpower

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the dates of the meetings between his Department and the recruitment company, Manpower *(a)* prior to June 1999 and *(b)* after June 1999 and the matters discussed at them. [160656]

Mr. Chris Smith: Prior to June 1999 my officials had contract review meetings with the recruitment company, Manpower on 5 July 1994, 11 October 1994, 24 April 1995 and 27 April 1995. The matters discussed included pricing, invoicing, typing services questionnaire, security clearance of staff, replacement staff, statistical data, appraisals, evaluation and the Department's procedural manual.

The contract agreement terminated in 1996.

Royal Parks Agency

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he will publish the report on the five-year review of the Royal Parks Agency; and if he will make a statement. [160943]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The report was published today and I have placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses. The report is also available on the DCMS website (www.culture.gov.uk).

The report's main conclusion and recommendation is that responsibility for the Royal Parks should remain with central Government and that the Royal Parks Agency (RPA) should continue to manage them although the Department should work towards establishing the Royal Parks as a non-departmental public body. The Government welcome the report and will respond in due course.

I am pleased to note the report's recognition of the essential role of the Royal Parks Advisory Board in helping the effective management of the Royal Parks by their advice to Ministers and to the Chief Executive. I am grateful for their contribution which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I very much value. We welcome the initiative the board has taken over the past year in extending their role by providing independent advice on a wider range of the agency's plans, performance and longer-term strategy.

Digital Television

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make it his policy to require all new television sets sold after 2004 to have digital receivers built into them. [160200]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Government wish all viewers to enjoy the benefits of digital broadcasting. When purchasing a new television set, it is important that consumers are aware that any set which does not include a digital decoder will not be able to receive television broadcasts without the use of a separate digital decoder once analogue transmissions cease. We have set out the criteria to be achieved before analogue terrestrial transmissions are switched off, and also have said that we expect that the criteria will be met in the period 2006–10. Both satellite and cable broadcasters are expected to cease analogue transmissions by that time. Given that most sets purchased now will still be in use at that time, we are encouraging television set manufacturers to produce generally affordable integrated digital televisions. We would like to see sales of analogue-only sets diminish rapidly in favour of televisions including a digital decoder for at least one of the three main platforms (terrestrial, satellite and cable). The UK cannot prohibit the sale of analogue-only sets that meet EU standards, but we will work with the Commission and with business on ways to encourage or require that all new televisions include a digital decoder as soon as practicable.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Everything but Arms Initiative

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what analysis the Government have undertaken of the impact of the Everything But Arms initiative on the Caribbean. [160942]

Clare Short: We have carefully considered the impact of the Everything but Arms initiative on all stakeholders. This includes Caribbean countries that are concerned about the possible impact that it might have on their preferential access to EU markets, particularly for sugar, rice and bananas. A summary of our analysis will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The analysis shows that none of the Caribbean's sugar industries is expected to suffer a significant deterioration in its financial performance due to EBA. For bananas, the impact will be negligible and for rice, the transition arrangements under EBA will mean that changes in market forces will be phased in gradually and the overall impact will not be very great.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to assist the preparations for the Rio + 10 conference; what contributions she intends to make at the conference; and if she will make a statement. [159783]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 38W. DFID is working closely with DETR and other Government Departments to ensure an effective UK contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

My Department plans to spend some £1.5 million to support the process. The largest contribution will go to the Government of South Africa to help them meet the costs of organising and hosting the Summit. The Department is also assisting the UN Secretariat to prepare for the Summit and to support developing country participation. A DFID-funded expert meeting on strategies for sustainable development is expected to provide recommendations for the preparatory process. My Department will also be a principal supporter of the UN Development Programme/European Community Poverty and Environment Initiative which is designed to demonstrate the poverty reducing potential of environmental interventions in the run-up to the Summit.

Both the Prime Minister and I spoke at the 6 March World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) conference on the Summit and I am placing a copy of my speech in the Library of the House.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her policy towards improving water storage and distribution networks in sub-Saharan Africa. [160670]

Clare Short: We place a high priority on improving access to potable water supplies and sanitation facilities for the world's poorest people. Sub-Saharan Africa currently has the lowest coverage, with almost half of the population not having access to safe drinking water or sanitation facilities. My Department works with Government and non-government agencies to improve the management of existing water supply schemes and to construct new, affordable schemes. This support includes water storage and distribution networks where locally appropriate. We currently have major water projects in Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique and South Africa.

Our policy on improving water (and sanitation) services is set out in the recently published strategy paper "Addressing the Water Crisis". I will send the hon. Member a copy and place a copy in the House Library. This details how we will work towards the target for water supply agreed at the UN Millennium Summit last September—to halve by 2015 the proportion of people unable to reach, or afford, safe drinking water.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the share of world trade of each of the most indebted countries *(a)* in 1980 and *(b)* in the latest year for which figures are available. [159762]

Clare Short: In 1980 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) held a share in world merchandise and services trade of 0.87 per cent. The figure in 1998 was 0.57 per cent. Over this period the volume of exports in merchandise and services rose from $21 billion to $38 billion. There are 41 HIPC countries. Figures for 1980 were not available in 11 of these countries. Figures for 1998 were not available in seven.

DEFENCE

Defence Estates Agency

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Estates Agency for 2001–02 [160862]

Dr. Moonie: As detailed in the Defence Estates Corporate Plan 2001–06, the following key targets have been set for the Agency:

Key Target 1:

Customer service—to achieve 90 per cent. of project deliverables on time and to budget.

Key Target 2:

Customer satisfaction—to achieve an overall customer satisfaction rating of 67 per cent. or more, as measured by the 2001–02 Customer Satisfaction survey.

Key Target 3:

Annual Stewardship Report—to have the report for 2000–01 ready for publication by 31 December.

Key Target 4:

Disposal Receipts—to achieve gross receipts of £550 million in FY 2001–02 to 2005–06.

Key Target 5:

Prime Contracting—to continue with the implementation of the regional prime contracting programme during the corporate plan period.

Key Target 6:

IIP re-accreditation—by 31 July.

Copies of the new Defence Estates Corporate Plan have been placed in the Library of the House.

British Forces Post Office Agency

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the British Forces Post Office Agency for financial year 2001–02. [160863]

Mr. Spellar: The Chief Executive of the British Forces Post Office Agency has set the following Key Targets for 2001–02.

Key Target 1a

To meet the customers' requirements as negotiated and agreed in Customer Supplier Agreements.

Key Target 1b

To achieve an increased level of customer satisfaction.

Key Target 2

To achieve an overall 3 per cent. increase in efficiency.

Key Target 3

To reduce the level of customer compensation attributable to BFPO by 3 per cent.

Defence Transport and Movements Agency

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Transport and Movements Agency for financial year 2001–02. [160864]

Mr. Spellar: The Chief Executive of the Defence Transport and Movements Agency has been set the following Key Targets for 2001–02:

Key Target 1

To meet the customers' requirements as negotiated and agreed in Customer Supplier Agreements.

Key Target 1a

94 per cent. or more of Agency transactions and services provided under call-off contracts to be within agreed performance criteria.

Key Target 1b

No individual Agency service or call-off contract to be less than 90 per cent. of agreed performance criteria.

Key Target 2

To achieve an overall 3 per cent. increase in efficiency.

Key Target 3

To demonstrate improved net added value.

Key Target 4

To achieve at least a satisfactory rating in the provision of operational transport and movements support.

Meteorological Office

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Meteorological Office for 2001–02. [160865]

Dr. Moonie: The Chief Executive of the Met Office is responsible for providing meteorological and related environmental services, including climate change prediction, to a wide range of customers, including the armed forces, Government, civil aviation, shipping, emergency services, media, commerce, industry and the general public. It also undertakes research related to meteorology and climate. This year, the Met Office will be set the following challenging targets:

Key Target 1:

To increase the value of the Numerical Weather Prediction Index by at least 2.0 points from the level achieved on 31 March 2001, by 31 March 2002;

Key Target 2:

To achieve a value for the Service Quality Index of at least 107.8 on 31 March 2002, from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 1997, in line with customer requirements;

Key Target 3:

To achieve a value for the Efficiency Index of at least 111.6 by 31 March 2003, from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 2000, and to achieve an increase of at least 1.4 Index points during 2001–02;

Key Target 4:

To achieve a positive return on capital employed in 2001–02, while returning an operating profit of at least £14.4 million before strategic investments;

Key Target 5:

To achieve strategic investments in 2001–02 of £15.9 million ± £1.5 million;

Key Target 6:

To achieve a total contribution from commercial activities in 2001–02 of at least £4.4 million;

Key Target 7:

To achieve a value for the Staff Skills Index of at least 107.5 by 31 March 2004, from a baseline of 100.0 as at 31 March 2001.

Defence Storage and Distribution Agency

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency for financial year 2001–02. [160866]

Mr. Spellar: The Chief Executive of the Defence Storage and Distribution Agency has been set the following Key Targets for 2001–02:

Key Target 1:

To meet the customers' requirements as negotiated and agreed in Customer Supplier Agreements.

Key Target 1a:

95 per cent. of all issues to consumers to meet Supply Chain Pipeline Times.

Key Target 1b:

98 per cent. of all receipts to be processed within agreed time limits.

Key Target 2:

To demonstrate continuous improvement in efficiency.

Key Target 2a:

To achieve an overall 5 per cent. reduction in the unit cost of output.

Key Target 2b:

To establish an accurate baseline cost of process output to be used as measurement in financial year 2002–03.

Key Target 3:

The value of inventory written off to be less than agreed levels.

United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office for the financial year 2001–02. [160867]

Dr. Moonie: The key targets set for the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office in 2001–02 are as follows:

1. Publish 100 per cent. of priority safety information within the stated time scales from the receipt of the original data.
2. Deliver defence specific outputs as defined in the Tasking Authorisation Forms. All agreed outputs delivered to time and quality.
3. Improve completeness and delivery of commercial orders. 95 per cent. of orders shipped to schedule and 98 per cent. line completeness at first pick by March 2002.
4. Design, build and populate the UKHO's hydrographic data management infrastructure. Data population to start by 2002.
5. Break even taking one year with another and achieve an average return on capital employed during the plan period of 7.5 per cent.
6. Achieve efficiency measure of 5 per cent. growth in "value added" per member of staff (based on financial year 2000–01) by financial year 2005–06.

Mrs. Organ: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the quinquennial review of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office will take place. [160868]

Dr. Moonie: The quinquennial review (QQR) of the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) will begin this month. The aim of the review is to make recommendations on the future means of delivery of the functions, products and services provided by the UKHO, assessing both the business environment and the strategic capability of the

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organisation and how the UKHO can best exploit its position in the future. In doing this, phase 1 of the review, which is expected to be completed by mid July, will:

> conduct a challenging examination of current arrangements, taking into account the requirements and views of customers, staff and other stakeholders;
>
> identify organisational and structural options for future product and service provision and provide costed options for change where this is considered appropriate in order to ensure responsive, coherent and cost-effective product and service delivery.

Following consultation, phase 2 of the review will go on to develop more detailed proposals for the targeting of improvements in performance and service delivery. The precise programme of work will be dependent on the finding of phase 1, but it is currently expected that it will be completed by November 2001.

The review will be carried out by a small team which will consult closely with the UKHO and with major stakeholders, and liaise with organisations within and outside of Government that could contribute to the review or be affected by it. The Ministry of Defence is also keen to hear the views of other organisations or individuals with an interest. These can be sent to: UKHO QQR Team, UK Hydrographic Office, Admiralty Way, Taunton, Somerset TA1 2DN. (e-mail: peterhobson@ukho.gov.uk). There will also be an opportunity for feedback on the UKHO website at www.ukho.gov.uk.

Service Pensions

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make an announcement in respect of his review of armed forces pensions. [160475]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Secretary of State for Defence on 16 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 756W.

War Widows Pensions

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of people affected and *(b)* the cost to the Exchequer of re-instating Army widow pensions to those widows who lost their pension on remarriage, prior to the change of policy. [160528]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on 27 November 2000, *Official Report*, columns 422–23W and 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 524–25W to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis).

Livestock (Armed Forces)

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what livestock the armed forces own other than for ceremonial purposes; and where they are kept. [159823]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 May 2001]*: Records are not held centrally of any livestock held by the armed forces.

Research Contracts

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by his Department on research contracts, broken down by region, for the most recent financial year for which figures are available. [149566]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 8 February 2001]*: Net expenditure outturn for my Department's major customers' research budgets in the Appropriation Accounts for financial year 1999–2000, published on 24 January, was £457.812 million. This sum includes research work placed with DERA but excludes technology demonstrator programmes, and loans and grants to DERA. It is not possible to provide a regional breakdown of research expenditure from available data.

Porton Down

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many films made by the Chemical Defence and Biological Establishment, Porton Down have been transferred to the Imperial War Museum since 1990; if he will place in the Library a list of the titles of each such film; what progress is being made in transferring further films from Porton Down to the Imperial War Museum; and if he will make a statement. [160493]

Dr. Moonie: It is believed that at least 70 films have been transferred to the Imperial War Museum (IWM) from the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down since 1990. Responsibility for producing a catalogue of acquisitions rests with the IWM. The Ministry of Defence continues to maintain dialogue with the IWM and staff at the Public Record Office and Porton Down about the suitability of other films for permanent preservation.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff since 21 November 2000 have been taken on at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down to deal with issues relating to Porton Down volunteers who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment. [160489]

Dr. Moonie: None. Since 21 November 2000, 12 members of staff have been re-assigned from other duties at the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down, to deal with issues relating to the Porton Down Volunteer Programme on a full or part-time basis.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if service volunteers who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down are entitled to receive a copy of technical reports which describe the experiments in which they participated. [160491]

Dr. Moonie: The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down respond to all inquiries from ex-Porton Down volunteers and these responses include an invitation to visit Porton Down to view the original record books and discuss any details with current members of staff.

Volunteers who visit CBD are given copies of records that refer to them personally and copies of other documentation, including technical reports, where they add relevant information to that already located in the volunteer records books. This is decided on a case-to-case basis.

Technical reports do not usually include names or personal detail and it is often not possible to relate reports to studies in which individual volunteers took part.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of the technical reports which were compiled by the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down to record the results of an experiment in 1989 in which Service personnel were exposed to Sarin nerve gas. [160490]

Dr. Moonie: The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down has published one technical report on the research undertaken with Sarin in 1989 which involved Service volunteers. This is Technical Paper No. 571 entitled "The Effects on the Eye of Prolonged Exposure to a Low Concentration of GB Vapour". I will make arrangements for a copy of this publication to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many films made by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down are held in the archives of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down; and if he will place in the Library a list of the titles and dates of each film which is currently held in these archives. [160492]

Dr. Moonie: The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment archives at Porton Down contain references to over 1,200 films. The titles have not been catalogued and in many cases are not very informative. It would require disproportionate cost to produce a meaningful list.

Appointments (Political Affiliations)

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many appointments he has made since May 1997 in accordance with the Nolan criteria; how many appointees were aged over 60 years at the time of appointment; and how many declared a political affiliation for *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrats. [160630]

Dr. Moonie: Since May 1997 there have been 361 public appointments to non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Ministry of Defence, made in accordance with the Nolan criteria under guidelines issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Of these, 206 were re-appointments of individuals already serving on the relevant body.

Of the 361, 93 were aged over 60, 12 declared a political affiliation for the Conservative party, three for the Labour party and none for the Liberal Democrats at the time of appointment and/or re-appointment.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* RAF pilots and aircrew, *(b)* Army flying personnel and *(c)* Royal Naval pilots and personnel have suffered from (i) deep vein thrombosis and (ii) pulmonary embolisms in the last five years; and how many were known by his Department to have suffered within 14 days of flying activities. [147192]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 29 January 2001]:* Central records maintained by my Department do not identify illness where it has not resulted in medical downgrading for a significant period. They may, therefore, not record cases of deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolisms. In fact, these records show one case of a pulmonary embolism from 1999. The individual concerned was also suffering from a serious illness, which may have been the cause of the pulmonary embolism. Neither the Royal Navy nor the RAF maintain additional collated records, and further information on their personnel could be obtained only by checking medical records individually. A collated Army record is, however, maintained. This shows two Army aircrew who have suffered deep vein thrombosis within the last five years, one of whom also suffered a pulmonary embolism. Neither had been engaged in military flying duties within the previous 14 days, but both had been passengers on a commercial aircraft within that period.

HEALTH

Meat Inspection Charges

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on meat inspection charges in smaller abattoirs. [R] [150872]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The Government's response to the report of the Meat Inspection Charges Task Force was published in the Rural White Paper on 28 November 2000 when, inter alia, we announced the provision of new, additional aid (worth £8.7 million in 2001–02) to help secure the future of small and medium-sized abattoirs.

As a result of this additional funding the Food Standards Agency was able to implement, from 2 April 2001, the recommendations of the Task Force to base meat inspection charges on the standard headage charges laid down in the EU Charges Directive or on actual inspection costs where these are lower.

General Practitioners

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent consultations have taken place with GPs over policy changes that will affect the way they work. [156735]

Mr. Denham: Officials in the Department meet the General Practitioners Committee of the British Medical Association regularly to discuss these matters. Officials also meet other primary care organisations regularly to discuss wider primary care issues.

Macular Degenerative Disease

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance his Department is giving to sufferers from macular degenerative disease. [158337]

Mr. Denham: We fund research into vision-related conditions through the Medical Research Council. They are currently funding several major research projects into macular degeneration, including a clinical trial at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast: "Radiotherapy in the treatment of subfoveal neovascular membranes (CNVM) in age-related macular degeneration of the eye" for which a grant was provided of £61,571. They have also provided a £1.5 million grant to look at "Genetic Susceptibility to Age Related Macular Degeneration."

We are also collaborating with the voluntary sector in developing low vision services for people who have lost vision as a result of eye diseases including macular degeneration. This entails improving co-ordination between the hospital eye service where patients are diagnosed, community opticians who are capable of supplying low vision aids, social services departments who can help with aids to independent living and mobility, and voluntary organisations who can provide talking books, guide dogs. Nothing can do more to improve the quality of life for people with visual handicaps than prompt, effective collaboration between these agencies.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average length of time patients waited to receive *(a)* digital and *(b)* other hearing aids was (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in Gloucestershire in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [158880]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Department does not collect information on waiting times for hearing aids as it collects data only on consultant-led specialities, and waiting for an appointment for a hearing aid to be fitted is not always consultant-led. Information is available for audiology which covers other things within that speciality. Data are collected for ear, nose and throat and audiological medicine, but this is not specific to hearing aids. These are shown in the table.

Average (median) out-patient waiting times in weeks for ENT and audiological medicine

	Specialty	
Quarter	*ENT*	*Audiological medicine*
Data for England		
March 2000	10.00	11.44
June 2000	8.83	10.91
September 2000	9.49	11.67
December 2000	9.33	11.29
Data for Gloucestershire HA (QDY)		
March 2000	8.15	[1]—
June 2000	7.77	[1]—
September 2000	8.15	[1]—
December 2000	7.69	[1]—

[1] No data

Note:

The out-patient average should be treated as an approximation only. This is because it is calculated from data split into four timebands. It is calculated as the median waiting time (in weeks) of those seen for a first out-patient appointment during the quarter following a GP referral.

Source:

QM08R quarterly waiting times return

Audiology Services

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent representations he has received about funding for audiology services; [160071]

(2) what his policy is on funding audiology services. [160070]

Mr. Hutton: Health authorities have received an average 6.2 per cent. real-terms increase for 2001–02. Funding for national health service audiology services is part of the normal responsibility of health authorities and trusts and audiology services should benefit from this very significant increase.

In addition, substantial extra funds have been provided for the "Modernising NHS hearing aid services" project, which is evaluating leading edge digital hearing aids for NHS patients, together with the evaluation of associated service delivery changes. An extra £10.75 million has been made available for the 20 NHS hearing aid departments involved in the project. If the project is successful, we anticipate by 2003–04 that an extra £25 million will be invested in NHS hearing aid services.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance about the steps audiology departments should be taking to make sure patients get the hearing aid they need was issued in July 2000.

Representations on NHS audiology services have been received from a wide range of individuals and organisations, including the Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

Hip Replacements

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the waiting list was for those waiting for hip replacement operations on the NHS in the north-west in each of the years from 1997 to date; [160086]

(2) what the cost of a hip replacement operation in the north-west was in each of the years from 1997 to date. [160085]

Mr. Denham: We do not collect procedure specific waiting list information.

Abattoirs

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abattoirs there were in the north-west in each of the years from 1997 to date. [160079]

Ms Stuart: Between 1997 and March 2001, there were 50 licensed red meat abattoirs and 16 licensed white meat abattoirs in the north-west (Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside). The number of licensed red meat abattoirs fell to 47 in late March, when three abattoirs surrendered their licences in order to take part in the cull schemes introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food during the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

Currently, licensed abattoirs are also subject to additional approval arrangements under the Foot and Mouth Disease Order as amended. Thirty-eight abattoirs in the north-west are approved to operate under these arrangements.

Skin and Respiratory Illnesses

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost was to the NHS of treating of *(a)* asthma and *(b)* hay fever in the last year for which figures are available. [160130]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available in the format required.

The table lists figures which relate to hospital-based admissions for asthma or recurrent wheeze which can include hay fever.

National schedule of reference costs: average unit cost data by healthcare resource group (HRG)—1999 to 2000

HRG code	*HRG narrative*	*Admission type*	*Number of FCES*	*Mean average £*	*Total cost £*
D21	Asthma more than 49 years or with complications and comorbidities	Day case	253	209	52,877
D21	Asthma more than 49 years or with complications and comorbidities	Elective in-patient	1,193	1,742	2,078,206
D21	Asthma more than 49 years or with complications and comorbidities	Non-elective in-patient	82,503	1,043	86,050,629
D22	Asthma less than 50 years or without complications and comorbidities	Day case	197	240	47,280
D22	Asthma less than 50 years or without complications and comorbidities	Elective in-patient	466	1,260	587,160
D22	Asthma less than 50 years or without complications and comorbidities	Non-elective in-patient	36,147	529	19,121,763
PO1	Asthma or recurrent wheeze	Day case	170	339	57,630
PO1	Asthma or recurrent wheeze	Elective in-patient	697	711	495,567
PO1	Asthma or recurrent wheeze	Non-elective in-patient	23,191	498	11,549,118
Total					120,040,230

The aggregate (total) figures have been produced using average cost figures only, and do not reflect specific costs in individual organisations. Activity data are based on fast-track data and need to be verified against final HES data where available, to ensure that "total" costs are not understated.

It should be stressed that these are "calculated" total cost figures and should be quoted in round terms, rather than assuming robust accuracy; for example, £120 million in 1999–2000. The costs of primary care treatment of these conditions are not included in reference costs and would need to be added to these figures to give total costs.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual drugs bill for asthma was in each of the last five years. [160135]

Ms Stuart: The information requested is not available centrally.

The costs of national health service prescription items for drugs used in the management of asthma and dispensed in the community in England from 1995 to 2000 (January to September) are shown in the table. Information on prescriptions dispensed in NHS hospitals is not available.

Number of prescription items and the associated net ingredient cost of drugs dispensed in the community for the management of asthma, 1995 to 1999, and 2000 (January to September), England

Year	*Prescription items (Thousand)*	*Net ingredient cost (£000)*
1995	33,936	410,899
1996	34,500	438,266
1997	35,512	466,229
1998	36,468	498,037
1999	36,639	519,755
2000[1]	27,044	388,215

[1] January to September

Notes:

1. The prescription information is from the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system and is based on a full analysis of all prescriptions dispensed in the community, i.e. by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered in England. Also included are prescriptions written in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man but dispensed in England. The data do not cover drugs dispensed in hospital or private prescriptions.
2. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of a drug. This cost does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to prevent *(a)* eczema, *(b)* hay fever and *(c)* asthma. [160132]

Mr. Denham: We recognise that asthma is the commonest chronic illness in England and policy emphasises that preventive action is of great importance. Hay fever and other allergic diseases, while not having the same symptoms as asthma, must also be avoided where possible and Government-funded research is ongoing into the benefits of allergen avoidance and immunotherapy for such conditions.

We fund research through the Medical Research Council. The MRC's work includes basic research into the causes of asthma and allergies, with particular effort at present on analysing the genetic factors that predispose some individuals and families to asthma and eczema. The MRC is also conducting controlled trials of methods for managing and preventing asthma. The total MRC spend on allergy and asthma in 1999–2000 was £4 million.

Included in this total are three projects looking at the causes of hay fever (among other allergies) and exploring possible ways of curing the condition; the spend on these was £200,000 in 1999–2000.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost to the NHS of treating of eczema was to the NHS in each of the last five years. [160150]

Mr. Denham: The Department does not centrally collect final total information on the cost of eczema to the national health service. However, information is available on both the costs of NHS prescription items for drugs used in treating eczema and also costs relating to hospital based admissions for the condition.

The costs of NHS prescription items for drugs used in the treatment of asthma and dispensed in the community in England from 1995 to 2000 (January to September) are as follows: for 1995 the net ingredient cost was approximately £6.7 million; in 1996 £6.8 million; 1997 £6.6 million; 1998 £6.4 million; 1999 £6.3 million; and for the January to September 2000 period the net ingredient cost was approximately £4.5 million. Information on prescriptions dispensed in NHS hospitals is not available.

In respect of hospital-based admissions for eczema, aggregate (total cost) figures have been produced using average cost figures. For 1997–98 the total cost was approximately £10.2 million, for 1998–99 the total cost was approximately £29.4 million, and for 1999–2000 the total cost was approximately £30.1 million. Figures are not available for published reference costs prior to the 1997–98 financial year. The figures do not include the cost of primary care treatment of these conditions.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are diagnosed as sufferers from *(a)* eczema and *(b)* hay fever. [160134]

Mr. Denham: It is not possible to state the number of people who have been diagnosed as suffering from allergies which include eczema and hay fever. This is due to the fact that many people diagnose themselves, and buy remedies at their local pharmacy, or are diagnosed by their general practitioners or appropriate clinic such as chest clinics or dermatology units. It is however estimated that at least 15 per cent. of the population is affected by allergy.

However, there were 8,000 admissions to national health service hospitals for 1999–2000 where the primary diagnosis could be described as asthma and 200 cases where the primary diagnosis could be described as hay fever (allergic rhinitus due to pollen).

Hospital Sites Development

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy to seek to encourage private developers who have purchased former hospital sites and land to provide low-cost housing in developments that they may undertake. [160272]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions is responsible for setting the national policy guidance in respect of the provision of low-cost housing. Local authorities include policies in their development plans that reflect this guidance. It is for them to ensure that their policies are adhered to when considering proposals for redevelopment of former hospitals.

Local Social Services

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with each of the London borough councils on the growth in their spending on the provision of local social services for the present financial year. [160269]

Mr. Hutton: Ministerial colleagues and I meet frequently with representatives of local councils, including London authorities to discuss growth, which will increase by 10.7 per cent. in real terms from 2000–01 to 2003–04.

Day Centres (Shropshire)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on day centre provision for people with learning disabilities in Shropshire. [160376]

Mr. Hutton: Shropshire has 12 day centres for people with learning disabilities. These provide a range of opportunities including employment, leisure, therapeutic help and access to education. Some of the centres provide extra support or activities for people who have severe disabilities.

Most of these centres are small, but the two centres based in Shrewsbury are large centres each catering for between 70 to 90 people. As part of a three-year county-wide improvement plan, social services have increased the learning disability budget by 18 per cent. to modernise the service and to provide users in Shrewsbury with small local provision, which will be consistent with the type of provision available in the rest of the county.

A Joint Investment Plan for Learning Disability in Shropshire has been submitted for formal evaluation to the Department. This, together with the action plan drawn up in response to the recent Joint Review report, gives details of an overall strategy to improve and integrate health and social services provision and make it more responsive to service users needs.

Learning Disabilities (Shropshire)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with learning disabilities have been supported for each year since 1992 by Shropshire county council's social services; and if he will make a statement. [160363]

Mr. Hutton: Numbers of residents with learning disabilities supported by Shropshire social services for each year since 1992 are given in the table.

Year	*Residents*	*Residential care*	*Nursing care*
1992	159	159	—
1993	164	164	—
1994	181	179	2
1995	172	171	1
1996	284	280	4
1997	277	264	13
1998	312	304	8
1999	300	288	12
2000	234	216	18

Source:

DH forms RA6 and SR1

Telford and Wrekin became a unitary authority in 1998. The data for the new unitary have been added to those for Shropshire for 1999 and 2000 for proper comparison with the earlier years.

These figures include people resettled from hospital and funded by the health authority. These represent 66 out of 234 people for 2000.

The council also supports 481 people with a learning disability, at home. This figure is taken from the Personal Social Services Personal Indicator's for 1999–2000. Shropshire was placed at band 5 for this indicator, reflecting very good performance in this area. Shropshire was one of the first local authorities to complete the resettlement of people with learning disabilities from long stay hospitals.

Medical Specialities

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has given to health authorities on their allocation of resources to individual medical specialties. [160263]

Mr. Denham: To enable health authorities to manage flexibly the totality of resources available to them, there is limited earmarking of funds within allocations. For 2001–02 the national health service plan implementation programme identified the following sums included in allocations with an intention that they be spent on the purpose for which they were allocated:

Priority	*£ million*
Cancer and coronary heart disease	450
Waiting times and access	423
Intermediate care and community equipment	188
Information management and technology	113

These sums reflect national estimates of investment needed to deliver targets and milestones in implementing the NHS plan. They are intended as a guide for local health communities in ensuring that their own plans will meet these targets and milestones.

A copy of the NHS plan implementation programme will be placed in the Library.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the high-level targets for the Medicines Control Agency for 2001–02. [160938]

Yvette Cooper: The high-level targets for the Medicines Control Agency are included in its annual business plan, copies of which have been placed in the Library today.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has approved the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's fifth code of practice. [160939]

Yvette Cooper: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's revised code of practice has been approved and was laid before the House today. Copies of the code have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has approved the publication of the second quinquennial review of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [160940]

Yvette Cooper: The report of the second quinquennial review of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has been approved and copies have been placed in the Library today. This was a thorough review of the authority and its work which included wide consultation with the public, service users and providers. The report acknowledges the value of the authority's role in this highly sensitive area.

The report makes important recommendations. Work on introducing improved quality assurance systems is in hand and we are working with the authority to agree an implementation plan for the other recommendations.

Strokes

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to address the incidence of stroke in ethnic minority groups, to identify and raise awareness among those at greatest risk and to provide accessible, culturally sensitive and appropriate prevention information. [160539]

Yvette Cooper: The Department is taking action to address the incidence of stroke in minority ethnic groups through the National Service Frameworks (NSFs) for coronary heart disease and older people.

Given the higher prevalence of stroke in some minority ethnic communities, the NSFs recognise the need to ensure that integrated stroke services and stroke prevention advice should take into account the need for advocacy support, especially for those patients and carers for whom English is not their first language.

The Department is currently funding the Stroke Association to produce information packs on high blood pressure, effects of diet, risks from smoking and alcohol and the importance of exercise. The packs will specifically target Afro-Caribbean people and will be publicised and distributed through local community, church and health groups by the end of 2001.

As part of the Department's tobacco education campaign, a dedicated campaign focused on ethnic minority populations is being developed. The campaign will start in summer of this year and will be supported by a specialist Asian language helpline.

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the target set in "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" of reducing stroke in those under 75 years. [160537]

Yvette Cooper: The target set in the White Paper "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" was not solely for stroke, but was for all circulatory diseases combined:

> "To reduce the death rate from coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke and related diseases in people aged under 75 by at least two fifths (40 per cent.) by 2010".

It is not yet possible to assess progress towards the target, since the latest available data (for the years 1997–99 combined) overlap with the start of the "Our Healthier Nation" strategy, which was published in July 1999. The last two years' data do demonstrate some movement towards the target, but there are still insufficient data points to establish a trend.

The table shows directly standardised mortality rates in England (based on three-year rolling averages) from stroke, CHD and for all circulatory diseases (the target group), among people aged under 75.

	Stroke	CHD	All circulatory diseases
1996 (1995–97)	24.5	88.9	139.6
1997 (1996–98)	23.8	84.3	133.8
1998 (1997–99)	22.8	79.2	127.0
Percentage change 1996–98	–6.6	–11.0	–9.0

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he will be issuing on the development of stroke registers to identify those at greater risk of stroke; and when that guidance can be expected. [160538]

Yvette Cooper: Advice on constructing and populating stroke registers will be contained in the Information Strategy for Older People which will be published shortly.

The National Service Framework for Older People requires that individuals at particular risk of stroke should be identified and offered advice and support to make lifestyle changes. General Practitioner practices should build on registers being developed for the prevention of coronary heart disease as described in the Coronary Heart Disease National Service Framework (Standards 3 and 4) and put in place models of care. The milestone for the registers is April 2004.

Blood Pressure Screening

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will investigate the effectiveness of introducing blood pressure screening programmes. [160540]

Mr. Denham: The National Service Frameworks for Coronary Heart Disease and Older People give clear guidance on the control of blood pressure.

The National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease sets out a requirement for people at risk of cardiovascular disease to be offered advice and treatment on a range of risk factors, including maintaining healthy blood pressure levels. By April 2003, clinical audit data no more than 12 months old will be available on the use of this and other interventions.

The National Service Framework for Older People stresses the importance of maintaining a healthy blood pressure. By April 2004, primary care groups and trusts will have ensured that every general practice, using protocols agreed with local specialist services, can identify and treat patients identified as being at risk of stroke because of high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation or other risk factors.

The United Kingdom National Screening Committee is awaiting the publication of the next health technology assessment report on blood pressure and will consider any wider screening issues on receipt of that report.

Kidney Failure

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the development of a national service framework for patients with kidney failure. [160628]

Mr. Denham: The Renal National Service Framework will be published in 2002. It will set out a national programme for the development of renal services, including specific standards and milestones, with implementation beginning in 2003.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will receive a reply to his letter of 3 January concerning Mr. Clive Mortimore; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in replying. [160632]

Mr. Denham: A reply to the hon. Member's letter was sent on the 8 May 2001.

I am sorry that the hon. Member did not receive an earlier reply. The Department's Permanent Secretary/Chief Executive has written to the hon. Member separately to apologise for the unacceptable delay in replying. The letter of 3 January could not be traced and a copy of the correspondence had to be requested. The Department has now implemented a number of measures to prevent this type of delay from happening again.

Eating Disorders

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of spending on mental health services in the NHS was allocated to eating disorders in the last financial year. [160785]

Mr. Hutton: It is not possible to identify the percentage of spending on mental health services allocated to the treatment of eating disorders in the last financial year because costs are not broken down by condition. However, we have drawn attention to the importance for people with eating disorders of being able to access effective treatment in the mental health National Service Framework. In addition, we have commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to develop a guideline on the treatment of eating disorders.

Body Piercing

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to regulate the piercing of body parts other than ears; and if he will make a statement. [160666]

Yvette Cooper: Local authorities in London already have powers to regulate cosmetic body piercing businesses. We believe that there should be primary legislation introduced to give local authorities outside London powers to regulate the hygiene and cleanliness of cosmetic body piercing businesses, when parliamentary time allows.

Shelton Hospital, Shrewsbury

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the capital projects for Shelton hospital, Shrewsbury agreed since 1 May 1997 and their value; and if he will make a statement. [160510]

Yvette Cooper: The regional office has approved one capital scheme for Shelton hospital since 1 May 1997. This was in respect of a low security unit (Wroxeter ward) which cost £1.6 million.

Shropshire's Community and Mental Health Service National Health Service Trust has also invested additional capital funding on the Shelton hospital site through various minor works upgradings on the site.

NHS Vacancies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS vacancies there were for *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* professions allied to medicine and *(f)* management and administration staff for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; how many posts in each category have been vacant for longer than three months; and if he will make a statement. [157323]

Mr. Denham *[pursuant to his reply, 9 May 2001, c. 453–54W]:* The Department has collected data on the number of posts that have been vacant for three months or more as at 31 March in 1999 and 2000. The information is in the table.

Department of Health vacancies survey 3 month vacancy figures[1] in England as at 31 March for each year

	1999	*2000*
Consultants	470	590
Qualified nurses	7,150	9,870
Of which:		
Midwives	370	490
Health visitors	100	190
Professions allied to Medicine[2]	860	1,510
Administration and Estates[3]	640	1,740

[1] Posts that had been vacant for 3 months or more at 31 March each year.

[2] Professions allied to Medicine staff include the following occupation groups: Chiropody, Dietetics, Occupational therapy, Orthoptics/optics, Physiotherapy, Diagnostic radiography, Therapeutic radiology, Art/Music/Drama therapy.

[3] Management and Administration staff are part of Administration and Estates Staff group, and can not be separately identified.

Note:

Figures are whole-time equivalents rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coal Mineshafts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report by Herriot Watt university on the impact of coal mineshafts in Stoke-on-Trent will be published. [160979]

Mr. Hain: I have today placed copies of the report in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. I am also writing to those individual hon. Members whom I know to have a keen interest in the report to send them a copy.

I know how householders have been blighted by concerns over mineshafts and I want to look at how we can help. The report shows the problems of blight are real but have many causes. Government will work with many others—the Law Society, the Coal Authority, mortgage lenders, valuers, local authorities etc.—to produce the right package of solutions. As a first step to identifying those solutions, we want to hear the views of those groups and others in the local community with an interest.

The report is being sent to relevant representative and professional bodies as well as to central and local government. It will be available on my Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk/consultations. I would be pleased to have views by 10 August 2001 on the report's findings, together with suggestions of action that individuals and organisations could take in response to the report. My Department will be seeking discussions with a number of relevant organisations. These discussions will also need to take account of the recent High Court case which the Coal Authority have accepted as finding that the information given by British Coal in mining reports prior to 1991 could in some cases be seen to have been incomplete.

Employment Agencies

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many companies which offer temporary to permanent products his Department met to discuss the effect of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations on temporary to permanent contracts *(a)* before and *(b)* after the final draft was published; [160652]

(2) if he will list the recruitment companies other than REC he met to discuss regulations 8 and 9 prior to the final draft of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations being published; [160658]

(3) what discussions he held with *(a)* recruitment companies and *(b)* REC relating to the impact of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations on work experience to permanent products before the final draft was published. [160653]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Before the final draft of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2001 was published, I had meetings with Manpower, Adecco, Blue Arrow, Brook Street, NES International and Hewett Recruitment. I also met the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, the Agents Association and the Local Employment Agencies Forum. A number of issues were discussed during those meetings, including the impact of the draft Regulations on the private recruitment industry's operation.

My officials have had regular meetings with agencies and their associations to discuss the effect of the draft Regulations. It is estimated that around 100 such meetings have taken place over the past two years. However, it is not possible to break this down by date.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 103W, what discussions he has had with *(a)* women's groups, *(b)* representatives of ethnic minority groups and *(c)* student groups regarding the implications of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations. [160649]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I am always willing to meet representative bodies to discuss the implications of the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2001, provided, of course, a mutually convenient time can be arranged. To date I have had no such meetings with groups representing women, ethnic minorities or students.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 103W, what assessment he has made of the impact of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations on recruitment bureaux products. [160650]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Regulatory Impact Assessment issued with the draft Regulations concluded that the net result of the proposed changes should be a more effective recruitment industry able to offer a better and speedier service, helping to create a more efficient and flexible labour market. The proposals should not affect those who have appropriate systems in place.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of regulations 8 and 9 of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations on those recruitment companies who operate with a dual role as agency and business; [160659]

(2) what assessment he made of the impact of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations on work experience to permanent products before the final draft was published. [160654]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I would refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 27 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 417W.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have held with Keith Faulkner to discuss the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; and on what dates; [160648]

(2) how many meetings his officials held with Manpower *(a)* before and *(b)* after the publication of the consultation document on the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; and on what dates; [160646]

(3) how many meetings Ministers held with Manpower relating to the consultation document on the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; and on what dates; [160647]

(4) what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have held with Manpower regarding the changes to temporary to permanent contracts contained in the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations. [160651]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I met Keith Faulkner of Manpower three times, on 9 September 1999, 10 January 2000 and 6 December 2000, to discuss the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations but I have not met him since the final draft Regulations were published on 1 February 2001. My officials met Mr. Faulkner on 23 August 2000. These discussions covered the various provisions of the draft Regulations, including the changes to temporary to permanent contracts.

Corus Plc

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ask Corus plc for a written assessment of the proposals submitted by the ISTC to restructure steel production at each plant in England and Wales. [160704]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Regrettably, Corus has taken its decision to proceed with the redundancies it outlined on 1 February and I do not think there is much to be gained from further contesting that decision. Our priority now is to put into place measures that will help redundant workers, their families and the communities in which they live as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced in this House on 3 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 962–66.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made by the Government on the recommendation made by the Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones, chaired by Professor Sir William Stewart, on developing and maintaining a national database on base stations and their emissions. [160941]

Ms Hewitt: I have asked the Radiocommunications Agency (RA) to develop and maintain a public database giving details on all operating cellular base stations and their emissions, in response to the recommendations of the Independent Experts Group on Mobile Phones report chaired by Professor Sir William Stewart.

The RA has been making steady progress in implementing this recommendation. It is developing an internet based solution known as "Sitefinder". Sitefinder will employ a map-based facility indicating the location of cellular phone base stations. More information on a particular base station will be available by simply clicking on the position indicator for the base station in question.

The mobile phone companies have been consulted during the development of this resource and have voluntarily agreed to disclose information on their respective base stations. RA have been formatting the data received from the cellular operators to make it compatible with the database software.

"Sitefinder" is currently undergoing strenuous system and user acceptance testing. It is hoped that "Sitefinder" should be made publicly available via the RA's website later this summer.

Redundancy Legislation

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to complete his Department's review of collective redundancy legislation. [160317]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* The Review will be completed as soon as possible, consistent with the need to carry out a thorough analysis of the facts and to involve a wide range of interested parties.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the Government's objectives with regards to environmentally friendly farming at the World Trade Organisation negotiations. [160449]

Mr. Caborn: EU Agriculture Ministers have adopted unanimous conclusions on the position of agriculture in WTO negotiations. These recognise the importance of further agricultural trade liberalisation as a contribution to economic growth.

They also emphasise the multifunctional character of agriculture, including its role in preserving the rural environment and in contributing to the viability of rural areas.

The Government recognise that agricultural trade liberalisation can have both positive and negative environmental effects, and to produce an effective solution it must be accompanied by environmental policies which are targeted on the delivery of environmental objectives. So, in pressing for further reductions in production-related support, the Government have consistently emphasised the importance of accompanying, targeted measures to conserve and enhance the rural environment and promote the rural economy.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what aims the United Kingdom Government have in the current round of World Trade Organisation negotiations; and if he will make a statement. [160448]

Mr. Caborn: Following the failure to launch a new round of trade talks at the Third Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle in December 1999, it was agreed at the WTO General Council meeting on 7–8 February 2000 that the mandated negotiations on agriculture and services would take place in the Agriculture and Services Council respectively.

The UK's aims in the agriculture negotiations are to achieve further liberalisation of agricultural trade in line with our objectives for reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to reduce the costs to consumers and taxpayers; to encourage the development of a viable and sustainable farming industry which is capable of competing without ongoing production support; and to conserve and enhance the rural environment and promote the rural economy through targeted measures.

In the current negotiations on services, the UK seeks further progressive liberalisation in line with the objectives of the General Agreement on Trade in Services. The UK, as the world's second largest exporter of services, has a major export interest in opening services markets around the world. We also support services liberalisation for the benefits it can bring to developing countries. These are reflected in the negotiating guidelines recently agreed by WTO Members which also recognise the right of WTO Members to regulate for national policy objectives. As the Government have made clear before, we will not be making any commitments that would call into question the public provision of health and education services in the UK.

The UK and EU remain committed to the launch of a new round of trade negotiations with a broad, inclusive agenda. Our position is the same as set out ahead of Seattle in the General Affairs Council (GAC) Conclusions of 26 October 1999. The next WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Doha, Qatar from 9–13 November 2001 is seen as the earliest opportunity at which a new Round may be launched.

Generators

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the terms of reference of the review of the impact of NETA on small generators. [160250]

Mr. Hain: Draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the review of the initial impact of NETA on smaller generators were published for consultation by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) on 9 April. Ofgem has received responses from 21 companies and representative organisations. These are currently being assessed by Ofgem who intend to submit revised ToR for my approval shortly. The final ToR will then be published by Ofgem along with a conclusions document summarising the responses and Ofgem's analysis of them. I want Ofgem to ensure that small generators including CHP, prosper under NETA.

Stop Now Orders

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what impact he expects the Stop Now Orders (Injunctions Directive) Regulations 2001 will have on the self-regulatory system in advertising; [160617]

(2) what discussions he has had with advertising regulators with regard to the Stop Now Orders (Injunctions Directive) Regulations 2001; and if he will place copies of all relevant correspondence in the Library. [160616]

Dr. Howells: It has always been the Government's policy to implement the EC Injunctions Directive (98/27/EC) in such a way as to preserve the self-regulatory system in advertising successfully established through the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry wrote to Lord Borrie, Chairman of the ASA, on 5 April to reassure him that, while remaining consistent with the requirements of the directive, the Stop Now Orders (EC Directive) Regulations 2001 contain a number of controls to achieve this.

First, one of the criteria which must be met by private consumer organisations seeking to be named is a readiness and willingness to co-operate with other authorities, bodies and persons having responsibility for regulation of matters covered by the regulations, including advertising. This includes the ASA. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would be obliged to refuse to name a private body seeking a designation to include advertising if it did not show that it was willing to co-operate with the ASA. If, having been designated, a named private qualified entity failed to co-operate with the ASA and so ceased to meet the criteria then my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would be required to strike it off the list of designated bodies.

In addition, both public and private qualified entities must first consult the Director General of Fair Trading before bringing any proceedings. If more than one of the Director General and any public or private UK qualified entity are contemplating bringing proceedings the Director General may, in any particular case, direct which of these entities is to bring such proceedings, or that only he may do so. Where the Director General directs that only he may bring such proceedings the regulations expressly provide that he may take into account in reaching that decision whether the infringement could be stopped by other means (for example, by the ASA) in deciding whether or not to bring court proceedings. I am confident from discussions with the OFT that the Director General will use this provision to stop both public and private UK bodies from bypassing the ASA's system of self-regulation.

With these safeguards in place, and with formal memoranda of understanding between the Director General and enforcement bodies, including the ASA, I am confident that the ASA's self-regulatory regime will be preserved and strengthened.

I am placing a copy of the Secretary of State's letter and Lord Borrie's reply in the Library of the House.

BNFL

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received the draft of the new BNFL corporate plan referred to in evidence by his officials to the Trade and Industry Select Committee, published in its Ninth report, Session 1999–2000; and if he will place copies of the most recent draft he has received in the Library. [160543]

Mr. Hain: My officials have recently received a copy of BNFL's latest Corporate Plan 2001–02 to 2005–06, which they will be discussing further with the company. The plan contains commercially confidential information and, under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, will not be made public.

Newspapers

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the competitiveness of the newspaper wholesale supply marketplace. [160265]

Dr. Howells: DTI works closely with businesses across the newspaper sector. In particular, I am aware of the agreement by those involved in both newspapers and magazines to enter into a process to re-examine distribution issues and we are following developments in those discussions.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* rural and *(b)* non-rural post offices closed in (i) the last 12 months for which figures are available and (ii) 2000. [159447]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* I am informed by the Post Office that, subject to final verification, a net total of 112 urban offices and 435 rural offices closed in year ending 26 March 2001[1]. Of the closures in the year, only four are permanent.

The primary reason for temporary closures is the retirement of sub-postmasters.

In addition, 123 rural and 46 urban offices reopened in the year. Also, subject to final verification, net closures in the final quarter of the year ending 26 March 2001 were 113.

This indicates a significant downward trend in post office closures compared with the third quarter when net closures were 135 and the first half of the year when closures were running at a rate of 150 per quarter.

This means that during the period April 2000 to March 2001, in the first half of the year net closures were running at 300 whereas in the final half of the year closures were 17 per cent. lower at 248.

Figures for the calendar year 2000 are not available. The Post Office is currently finalising with the Postal Services Commission a process and format for reporting information on the post office network on a quarterly basis with effect from the current financial year.

[1] Based on the Post Office's traditional definition of rural offices as those serving communities with under 6,300 residents.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former coal miners suffering from *(a)* emphysema, *(b)* chronic bronchitis and *(c)* asthma, or their widows, have outstanding claims for compensation and have received no payment to date; and how many such cases have been paid (i) in full and (ii) in part at the most recent available date. [160611]

Mr. Hain: To date, IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have received over 145,000 claims in respect of respiratory disease; 1,000 new claims continue to be initiated each week. Of these, almost 95,000 are from live claimants and the remaining 50,000 claims are pursued by the claimants' estate.

Until claims are assessed, the type and level of injury cannot be identified into the categories above.

The Department has made 28,363 interim payments and 8,135 payments in full and final settlement. Together, £142.2 million has been paid in total compensation for respiratory disease to date.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many medical assessment procedures were conducted each week since 1 January 2000 in the miners' compensation claim for chest disease. [160497]

Mr. Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave on 13 March 2001, *Official Report,* columns 548–49W.

The individual weekly totals from 11 March 2001 to date are as follows:

Week ending	*Number of MAPs*
11 March	659
18 March	565
25 March	570
1 April	537
8 April	694
15 April	541
22 April	507
29 April	757

The total number of MAPs undertaken to date is 18,048.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been spent *(a)* to date and *(b)* during the last 12 months, under the provisions of the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979. [160535]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply as Minister responsible for the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979.

Since the Act came into force in 1980 and up until April 2001, the total amount paid out has been £84.5 million. The total amount paid in the last complete financial year 2000–01 was £11,885,000.

CABINET OFFICE

Government Business

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what guidance is issued to Government Departments on the conduct of Government business once an election is announced. [160945]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Prime Minister has written to ministerial colleagues about Government business during the election. Guidance for civil servants covering their conduct was also issued to Departments, and specific guidance has been issued to special advisers. Copies of all three documents have been placed in the Libraries of the House, as well as guidance on the use of the Knowledge Network system.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Fines

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what percentage of court fines were collected in each year since 1971. [160474]

Jane Kennedy: Figures for court fines alone are not available. In the year 1999–2000, the magistrates courts received payment of 58.1 per cent. of the value of new impositions and orders made in that period in criminal matters (including fines, compensation orders, confiscation orders and contributions to legal aid) although some receipts were in relation to amounts imposed in earlier years. In the period April 2000 to December 2000, the figure was 54.9 per cent. Data collection of this sort started in April 1999, and figures for earlier periods are not available.

Public Records

Helen Jackson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if he will list those public organisations which are responsible for the maintenance of their own public records and exempt from supervision by the Public Record Office; and what powers he has to ensure that such bodies keep proper records to the standards applied by the Public Record Office. [160542]

Mr. Lock: Under the Public Records Act 1958 s.3(1–2), all bodies holding public records are responsible for their maintenance, and do so under the guidance, supervision and co-ordination of the Keeper of Public Records. No public records body is exempt from the supervision of the Public Record Office.

All public authorities will be subject to the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice for records management under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Work is ongoing with the Information Commissioner to establish the division of responsibility for the supervision of records management in public authorities.

The Public Records Act 1958 allows for selected public records of enduring historical value to be held in places outside the Public Record Office by deposit under s.4(1) of the Act. The Keeper of Public Records may withdraw place of deposit status from an office if appropriate standards of public records storage and access are not maintained.

TREASURY

National Minimum Wage

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his Department's estimates are of the number of people who have benefited from the national minimum wage in *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency, *(c)* South-West Devon constituency and *(d)* Plymouth unitary authority area. [160242]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mrs. Linda Gilroy, dated 9 May 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of people in who have benefited from the national minimum wage (NMW) in *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency, *(c)* South West Devon constituency and *(d)* Plymouth unitary authority area (160242).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published estimates of the number of jobs paid at less than NMW rates for 1998, 1999, and 2000. These estimates are based on an improved methodology using data from the New Earnings Survey (NES) and Labour Force Survey (LFS). This methodology provides the best estimates for the number of jobs in the UK paid below low hourly rate thresholds and was developed to overcome the deficiencies inherent in using the NES and LFS separately for measuring low pay.

Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions are posted on the National Statistics website at: www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/themes/labour_market/nmw_lowpay_tables.asp

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies and Unitary Authorities of numbers of jobs paid below NMW rates are not available on the basis of the methodology applied for producing the national and regional level figures.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give, in cash and real terms, the expenditure in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England on (i) education, (ii) health and personal social services, (iii) roads and transport, (iv) housing, (v) law, order and protective services, (vi) trade, industry, energy and employment, (vii) agriculture, fisheries, food and forestry and (viii) total expenditure in the form set out in Chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (Cm 5101) in each year from 1979–80 to 1999–2000. [160629]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information on expenditure by function and country, in cash terms and per head, is set out in chapter 8 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) 2001–02 (Cm 5101), from 1995–96 up to 1999–2000. Real terms expenditure can be derived using the latest GDP deflator series, updated on 24 March 2001, available in the Commons Library.

Similar information for earlier years (back to 1985–86) has been published in previous editions of PESA. But there have been significant definitional, classification and coverage changes that mean data are not fully comparable between successive editions of PESA. A consistent and comparable time series for expenditure by function and country for the years prior to 1995–96 is not available.

Barnett Formula

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the level of funding apportioned per head of population by the Government under the Barnett formula in Scotland and in the north-west of England, broken down by spending on *(a)* transport, *(b)* education, *(c)* health and social services, *(d)* trade and industry and *(e)* tourism. [160626]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Barnett formula is used to allocate funding to the devolved Administrations. It is for the devolved Administrations to decide how to allocate their budgets reflecting their own priorities. The Barnett formula is not used to determine spending allocations within England. Information on identifiable total managed expenditure per head by country and region and function is published in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses.

Financial Services

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to commence powers making the Financial Services Authority the single financial services regulator under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. [160978]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I am pleased to announce that the Government will be commencing, with effect from 18 June 2001, provisions of the Act which make the Financial Services Authority the single financial services regulator, and give it rule-making powers. These provisions will enable the FSA to make the key provisions of its rule-book no later than end July 2001 so that the financial services industry can train and prepare for the commencement of the main provisions of the Act no later than end November 2001.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hills Task Force

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the report of the Hills Task Force. [160947]

Mr. Nick Brown: I published the report today. The task force has achieved a great deal in three months and I am grateful to its members, particularly the farmers, who have had enormous personal worries due to foot and mouth disease.

I asked the task force to undertake a scoping study, and it has made a thorough one. It has made a number of recommendations, which we will need to examine carefully—to test the evidence and the value for money, to consider compliance with EU rules, and to hear the views of interested organisations including the other Government Departments which are affected. Some recommendations are for the longer term. Others might be more immediately useful in helping the industry, and particularly the hills sector, to recover from foot and mouth disease, and we shall need to look at these ones much more quickly.

The report is available in the House Libraries and on the MAFF website.

Inputs Task Force

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the report of the Inputs Task Force. [160949]

Mr. Nick Brown: I published the report today. The task force found that across the board, UK farmers do not pay more for their inputs than their competitors in Europe, but competitive trade can be frustrated by a lack of transparency in the market, commercial arrangements and differing regulatory requirements for some inputs across EU member states. They also found that there was a wide range of efficiency of input use and substantial scope for improvement.

The report contains a number of recommendations for action by both Government and industry to reduce input costs and optimise input use. The Government will consider these carefully and publish a full response as soon as possible.

The report is available in the House Libraries and on the MAFF website.

RAF Lyneham

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reason the practice of renting out grassland on RAF Lyneham for grass keep has been discontinued. [159262]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

We have been unable to find any records concerning the renting of grassland for the purpose of grass keep at RAF Lyneham.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 4 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 224W, on IACS, if IACS applicants submitting electronically can be protected against the Post Office using their names and addresses for commercial purposes. [160241]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Applicants submitting their 2001 IACS forms electronically must first obtain a digital certificate which they use to digitally sign their applications. Digital certificates are issued by commercial companies who have been accepted as competent Certification Authorities. There are currently two digital certificate providers approved by the Office of the e-Envoy: Equifax Secure who issue SecureMark certificates and the British Chambers of Commerce in partnership with Royal Mail Viacode who issue ChamberSign certificates.

In order to obtain a digital certificate applicants provide personal information to the Certification Authority. The information supplied to certificate providers by applicants is held under the terms of the UK Data Protection Act 1998 and as such cannot be used for any purposes other than that for which it was originally intended, unless authorised by the applicant. This includes other commercial purposes.

As part of the Public Key Infrastructure which underpins digital certificate technology, some of this information (name, company name and e-mail address) will be held in a public electronic directory. This is necessary to enable the transmission of secure e-mail.

In addition, section 11 of the Data Protection Act 1998 also offers protection to the applicant against the use of personal data for the purposes of direct marketing. Section 11 states:

> (1) An individual is entitled at any time by notice in writing to a data controller to require the data controller at the end of such period as is reasonable in the circumstances to cease, or not to begin, processing for the purposes of direct marketing personal data in respect of which he is the data subject.

> (2) If the court is satisfied, on the application of any person who has given a notice under that subsection (1), that the data controller has failed to comply with the notice, the court may order him to take such steps for complying with the notice as the court thinks fit.
>
> (3) In this section "direct marketing" means the communication (by whatever means) of any advertising or marketing material which is directed to particular individuals.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the outcome was of the recent consultation exercise into an appeal mechanism for IACS claimants in England. [160948]

Mr. Nick Brown: The responses to the consultation exercise on an IACS appeals mechanism in England that began in December 2000 have now been evaluated and I am pleased to say that new appeal arrangements for IACS claimants in England will be introduced.

These arrangements will reflect the three-stage appeal mechanism on which we consulted that attracted positive support from the farming industry for handling IACS appeals in England. The decision to proceed with the introduction of the new arrangements is in line with both the recommendations of the IACS and Inspections Red Tape Working Group and, more recently, of the House of Commons Agriculture Committee in its report on "The Implementation of IACS in the European Union."

A good deal of detailed work remains to be done but we aim to work with industry to introduce the new arrangements as soon as we can.

BSE

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make available the latest progress report prepared by his Department on bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [160951]

Mr. Nick Brown: A further progress report on BSE in Great Britain was placed in the Library of the House today.

The report outlines the measures which have been taken to protect public health since June 2000 and includes the latest EU requirements for testing and surveillance.

There is also a section on the protection of animal health which covers controls on animal feed.

The epidemiology section shows that the epidemic of BSE in Great Britain continues to decline in line with predictions.

The report is also published on the MAFF website: www.maff.gov.uk.animalh/bse/index/html

Beef Imports

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last wrote to the Prime Minister on the subject of imported over-30-month beef products. [146400]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 22 January 2001]*: Letters from Government Ministers to the Prime Minister fall under the exemption in Part II Section 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, but I last wrote to the Prime Minister on this issue on 16 November 2000.

Classical Swine Fever

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the source of the outbreak of classical swine fever in East Anglia last year and the lessons the Government have drawn from its occurrence. [153246]

Mr. Nick Brown: A wide-ranging meeting was held between officials and key stakeholders on 16 February 2001 to review the sources of the outbreak and lessons learned. However, further consideration of these issues has had to be postponed while the State Veterinary Service concentrates on eradicating the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Investigations into the sources of both outbreaks will continue as a matter of urgency.

Pig Swill

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ban the use of swill as a source for the feeding of pigs. [153961]

Ms Quin: With effect from 24 May, there will be a ban on the swill feeding of catering waste which contains meat or has been in contact with meat to livestock. This ban also includes the feeding of poultry slaughterhouse waste and wet fish as swill.

There will be a three-week phase-in period up to 24 May, which is intended to ensure that animals can be weaned off waste food on to an alternative diet safely.

Meat Imports

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries where farm animal diseases are widespread from which *(a)* meat, *(b)* meat products, *(c)* poultry and *(d)* poultry products are imported, indicating the country and disease together with the amount imported over the last year for which figures are available; and what plans he has to ban such imports. [156409]

Ms Quin: The Community's animal and public health import requirements for animal products include disease control provisions. In particular these relate to the List A notifiable diseases of the Office International des Epizooties which include foot and mouth disease, and classical swine fever among others. Unless third countries can demonstrate that they have veterinary and public health facilities to cope with possible outbreaks of these diseases they will not be eligible to export animal products into the Community.

Imports of meat and poultry and their products are allowed from third countries which have outbreaks of diseases, but only if they can attest and demonstrate that they have in place animal and public health safeguard measures as laid down in Community law. Where any of these measures are not met the UK will prohibit the import of products which may cause risk to public or animal health. My officials are preparing information on the amount of imports into the UK last year of meat and poultry and their products from countries or parts thereof which have had outbreaks of List A diseases in the last year. I will write to the hon. Member with this information in the near future and place a copy in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from which countries where standards of animal (i) welfare and (ii) health and hygiene are lower than those in the UK, *(a)* meat, *(b)* meat products, *(c)* poultry and *(d)* poultry products are imported; and what plans he has to prohibit such imports. [156404]

Ms Quin: World Trade Organisation rules do not permit us to use animal welfare considerations as a criterion for the import of meat and poultry. I do not in any case believe that restricting trade is necessarily the answer. It is far better to work, as we do, to improve welfare standards across the EU and in third countries.

On health and hygiene, imports into the UK of meat and poultry and their products are governed by Community legislation, which protects both animal and public health requirements. Under these rules only third countries approved by the Commission may import into the Community and subsequently imports may start only when the Commission agrees a list of establishments in that country which meet established Community hygiene standards. The lists of countries and establishments allowed to import into the Community the products listed are available on the Commission's website at: http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/sanco/vets/info/data/listes/table0.h tml.

Responsibility for ensuring that third countries meet these requirements lies with the Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission. The UK will prohibit the importation of animal products that do not meet Community standards.

Fisheries

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what information he has collated about the level of Government aid paid to the fishing industry of other EU member states; [157238]

(2) what information he has collated about *(a)* aid, *(b)* subsidy and *(c)* support given to national fishing industries over the last year by Governments in (i) France, (ii) Belgium, (iii) the Republic of Ireland, (iv) the Netherlands and (v) Denmark. [158435]

Mr. Morley: I am placing a note in the Library of the House containing the latest information which we have.

Chinese Poultry Meat

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the disease risks from the proposed importation of poultry meat from the People's Republic of China. [157595]

Ms Quin: EU law establishes the requirements for the importation into the EU of fresh poultry meat from third countries. The European Commission's Food and Veterinary Office is responsible for carrying out inspections in third countries from which meat is imported. They need to be satisfied that any third country is complying with all the relevant community provisions before imports may be permitted.

Imports into the community of poultry meat from China were suspended in 1996 as their hygiene standards did not meet community import requirements. Following a number of Commission missions to inspect Chinese veterinary controls and hygiene standards, the Commission proposed to reinstate the specific areas of China previously allowed to export poultry meat as they once again met all Community requirements. Imports could not restart until a list of approved establishments had been drawn up. This has now been done and member states agreed on 24 April to permit the resumption of exports from approved establishments in China from 24 May.

Transport (Disinfection)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he provides to vets on the implementation of Directive 91/628 in respect of the disinfection of transport. [159587]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* These requirements are currently implemented by the Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection)(England)(No. 2) Order 2000 (SI 2000/1618), which came into force on 6 July 2000. The main provision of this Order is that, subject to certain exemptions, livestock transports should be cleansed and disinfected after each use. Guidance on the Order was issued in November 2000 to all members of the State Veterinary Service and to local authorities who enforce the Order.

Flood Defence

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 30 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 501W, on flood defence, if he will list the pilot studies being undertaken; and when they will be assessed. [160275]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency is undertaking the following pilot catchment area studies utilising recently prepared guidelines:—

North-east—River Derwent catchment

North-west—River Irwell catchment

Midlands—River Severn upstream of Gloucester

Southern—River Medway and tributaries

South-west and Moors—Catchments draining across the Somerset Levels.

The progress of these studies will be closely monitored. A review of the lessons learnt from these studies in autumn 2001, together with feedback from consultation on the current guidelines, will be incorporated into revised guidelines for the main programme of such studies leading to Catchment Flood Management Plans.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 11 April concerning a constituent. [160281]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* My noble Friend Baroness Hayman replied to the letter from my hon. Friend on 8 May.

Processed Food Exports

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to restore UK exports of those food products that contain processed meat and dairy ingredients which conform to the requirements laid down by Decision 2001/172/EC to EU applicant countries. [160401]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* I wrote on 27 April to the Ambassadors of all those EU applicant countries which have imposed import restrictions on UK products going beyond the requirements laid down in Commission Decision 2001/172/EC, urging their governments to reconsider their positions.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans the Government have to table proposals for reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. [160622]

Ms Quin: The CAP is failing to deliver what farmers, the rural economy and the environment need. The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP to enable the industry to respond flexibly to consumer wishes without being constrained by the market-distorting nature of the current CAP, and to securing a CAP which is compatible with the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.

Responsibility for presenting proposals to reform the CAP rests with the European Commission. We expect a package of reforming measures to issue next year for a number of key CAP commodity regimes. We will continue to work closely with the Commission and other member states to drive forward the reform agenda.

Farm Business Advice Service

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what services are offered by the Farm Business Advice Service; and what funds have been allocated to it. [160529]

Ms Quin: The Farm Business Advice Service provides up to three days of free one-to-one business advice to farmers and growers in England. The service provides a business health check leading to the preparation of an Action Plan that will help farmers develop better business practices and signpost them to organisations that can provide further support and advice. £4.1 million was spent on delivery of the Farm Business Advice Service in 2000–01 and the service has a budget of £5.25 million for 2001–02.

An enhanced form of the service is being introduced for those farmers whose livestock have been compulsorily slaughtered under the foot and mouth control measures. They are in particular need of help to plan ahead and will be offered up to five days' free advice. Under the enhanced service advisers will help individual farmers develop an effective recovery or exit strategy, draw up a business plan for the farm, explore and develop new income opportunities and access the range of other support measures available. The farm business advisers will draw on guidance the Ministry will provide for farmers who are considering restocking. The additional cost of the enhanced service will be £10.4 million, £4.4 million of which will be funded by carrying forward unspent provision from 2000–01.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in which countries type O foot and mouth virus is *(a)* endemic and *(b)* responsible for outbreaks in the last year; and in respect of each country, what restrictions on livestock product exports to Britain were implemented, and when. [153360]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Pan Asian type O virus strain of foot and mouth disease is endemic in most of Asia and the middle east. In the past year there have been outbreaks of this type in Japan, South Korea, China, Eastern Russia and throughout the middle east and South East Asia. There have been outbreaks due to other type O virus strains in South Africa and South America, in particular Brazil and Uruguay.

The UK, in accordance with Community legislation, does not allow the importation of meat and meat products from any of the countries affected by the Pan Asian O type virus. The single exception concerns animal casings from Japan, China and Mongolia, which must be treated in accordance with the animal health controls in EU legislation. Imports of meat are allowed from Brazil but only from regions that are free of FMD. Veterinary certification attesting to that must accompany each consignment. Following notification from the European Commission of outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in South Africa and Uruguay, the Government took action to prohibit imports. In respect of South Africa, England and Wales prohibited imports of fresh meat with effect from 5 January, Scotland on 8 January and Northern Ireland on 17 January. In respect of Uruguay, England and Wales prohibited imports of fresh meat with effect from 26 April with Northern Ireland and Scotland taking similar action with effect from 1 May.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the consignment of sheep that was exported to France on 31 January and which tested positive for foot and mouth disease. [160950]

Mr. Nick Brown: A consignment of 402 sheep was certified for export to France on 31 January from premises in Wales. In early March the French authorities blood tested 31 of the animals for foot and mouth disease before slaughtering them and seven samples gave positive results. The French authorities have now confirmed that the samples that initially showed positive results have been subject to further testing with negative results. They have concluded that the earlier test results were false positives.

This explanation from the French authorities supports our view that, contrary to media reports, foot and mouth disease did not go undetected in sheep in Great Britain for up to two months prior to the disease being confirmed.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made as to the best materials to be employed in the construction of pyres for the incineration of dead livestock, to minimise the production of dioxins and furans, and in particular TCDDs and TCDFs, from such pyres; and if he will make a statement. [159850]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

Guidance has been issued by the Department of Health entitled "FMD: Measures to minimise risk to public health from slaughter and disposal of animals—further guidance" to provide practical advice to those at the local level on the best way, from a public health perspective, to dispose of animal carcases (available on www.doh.gov.uk/fmdguidance). This includes guidance on the construction and siting of pyres which takes account of the possible risks to health from the emissions of air pollutants from the pyres. The Department of Health has also published a risk assessment "Foot and Mouth—Effects on health of Emissions from Pyres Used for Disposal of Animals" (available on www.doh.gov.uk). The risk assessment provides estimates of the release of dioxins and other air pollutants from pyres and predicted concentrations in air. Detailed advice on the materials to be used for the construction of pyres is set out in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food "Air Code". This also includes advice on the materials which should not be used as fuels in such pyres, so as to minimise the production of air pollutants such as dark smoke, dioxins and furans.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made of the risks associated with imports of live horses from countries with foot and mouth disease. [153972]

Ms Quin: Horses are not susceptible to foot and mouth disease. Nor are they capable of incubating or transmitting the disease except by mechanical means, for example via their hooves, tack, clothing or equipment. The Office International des Epizooties (OIE—the international animal health organisation) provides recommendations for precautions that should be taken by countries importing live animals from areas where foot and mouth disease is present although these recommendations do not include requirements for horses.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made of the risk of the spread of the foot and mouth virus in smoke from pyres used to incinerate infected carcases; and what research has been carried out on the minimum temperature needed to kill the virus during incineration. [156375]

Ms Quin: The Institute of Animal Health at Pirbright has recently produced a report, in collaboration with MAFF and the Meteorological Office, on the spread of the foot and mouth disease virus from the burning of animal carcases on open pyres. This report is to be published in the Veterinary Record shortly.

Six pyres, located in Devon, Exeter and Worcestershire, were monitored. Additional pyres are currently being investigated in Cumbria and Devon. The report concludes that early results indicate that breakdowns due to virus dispersion from pyres are unlikely to occur in general and the pyres analysed to date have shown no evidence that breakdowns due to this cause have occurred.

The Institute of Animal Health has informed the Ministry that the virus is inactivated at temperatures above 50 degrees centigrade. There may be a small thermo-resistant element of the virus which is also destroyed at 70 degrees, but expert opinion is that this is likely to be insignificant in the possible spread of infection from pyres.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what the source was of the British sheep which were confirmed as having foot and mouth disease in France; [156432]

(2) if he will list the consignments of live sheep exported from the UK between 30 January and 23 February. [156433]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 30 March 2001]:* Foot and mouth disease was confirmed in France in British sheep consigned from premises in the Hereford and Worcester area. Between 1 February and 20 February 2001, 45,808 sheep were certified for export from Great Britain to other member states. Figures for exports from Northern Ireland are not available. The destination member states and the number of consignments exported were as follows:

	Number
France	69
Belgium	3
Germany	10
Italy	3
Netherlands	31
Ireland	2

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to compensate farmers who are affected by culling on farms contiguous to those with confirmed outbreaks of foot and mouth disease for the value of unused feed and other items on the farm which are rendered valueless by the cull. [156771]

Ms Quin: Feedingstuffs on infected premises and on premises contiguous to infected premises will be destroyed if they are considered to be contaminated and cannot be disinfected. Compensation is payable for the market value of animals slaughtered and, in line with the Animal Health Act 1981, for any feedingstuffs or any other materials destroyed or seized as being contaminated. Farmers will not receive compensation for items which will go unused as a result of foot and mouth disease which are not seized by the Ministry.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the compensation for milk wasted as a result of foot and mouth disease is calculated; what representations he has received regarding compensation levels for milk; what considerations informed the decision to set the level of compensation at a rate below market price; what plans he has to revise the structure of compensation; and if he will make a statement. [156698]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 3 April 2001]:* The Animal Health Act 1981 grants the Ministry powers to seize and dispose of anything necessary for preventing the spread of foot and mouth disease. Milk from infected premises and premises considered to be at risk of or exposed to infection is therefore seized, disinfected and disposed of.

Compensation is paid for anything seized for the purpose of preventing foot and mouth disease. Section 36 of the Act says that compensation for anything seized shall be its value at the time of seizure. Compensation for milk is therefore paid at the price the owner of the dairy currently receives for supplies to milk buying companies. Farmers will not receive compensation for items which will go unused as a result of foot and mouth disease which are not seized by the Ministry.

The Ministry has not received any representations regarding compensation levels for milk and there are no plans to revise the compensation structure.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what contingency plans were drawn up by his Department prior to the current outbreak for the handling of an outbreak of foot and mouth disease; and at what point in the outbreak it was proposed that the Army should become involved. [156876]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 4 April 2001]:* The Ministry has contingency plans to deal with notifiable exotic animal diseases, including foot and mouth disease. These are regularly updated and tested by the State Veterinary Service.

At each stage of the current outbreak we have called on the appropriate resources. As the disease grew, so did our response. We were in touch with the Ministry of Defence on 20 February, to alert them that there had been an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Essex, and that military assistance might be required. This led to the first active deployment of troops on the ground on 16 March following a formal request by MAFF for such MOD assistance on 14 March.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received calling for higher compensation under foot and mouth welfare measures for organically reared pigs than that already available for non-organically reared pigs. [157338]

Ms Quin: The Ministry has received a number of representations from keepers of pedigree animals and producers of organically reared animals, regarding payments under the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme.

The scheme is designed to provide payments to farmers to recognise the welfare needs of animals that may arise because of foot and mouth disease related restrictions. It is not a compensation scheme. The scheme helps farmers who have no means of moving livestock by disposing of animals which cannot be kept in good welfare conditions and by providing money to help them keep any remaining animals in good condition.

There are no plans to increase payments for pedigree or organically reared animals.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were *(a)* awaiting slaughter and *(b)* slaughtered on each day of the foot and mouth outbreak. [157160]

Ms Quin: MAFF publishes slaughter and awaiting slaughter figures each day. These reflect the data then available. As further data become available these figures may alter. The figures in the table reflect the position as of 1 May 2001.

Number of animals slaughtered and awaiting slaughter—cumulative total by day

Thousand

Date	*Slaughtered*	*Awaiting slaughter*
1 May 2001	2,382	118
30 April 2001	2,380	116
29 April 2001	2,375	113
28 April 2001	2,368	119
27 April 2001	2,359	117
26 April 2001	2,340	124
25 April 2001	2,333	116
24 April 2001	2,319	108
23 April 2001	2,297	117
22 April 2001	2,277	123
21 April 2001	2,249	137
20 April 2001	2,203	162
19 April 2001	2,158	186
18 April 2001	2,106	193
17 April 2001	2,072	180
16 April 2001	2,040	163
15 April 2001	1,985	203
14 April 2001	1,925	243
13 April 2001	1,854	288
12 April 2001	1,785	277
11 April 2001	1,709	283
10 April 2001	1,633	299
9 April 2001	1,555	288
8 April 2001	1,484	312
7 April 2001	1,420	318
6 April 2001	1,338	352
5 April 2001	1,255	365
4 April 2001	1,183	367
3 April 2001	1,103	372
2 April 2001	1,021	386
1 April 2001	947	407
31 March 2001	870	419
30 March 2001	799	394
29 March 2001	712	401
28 March 2001	662	375
27 March 2001	604	331
26 March 2001	562	318
25 March 2001	523	276
24 March 2001	488	256
23 March 2001	437	244
22 March 2001	400	223
21 March 2001	351	231
20 March 2001	313	198
19 March 2001	286	172
18 March 2001	266	152
17 March 2001	230	157
16 March 2001	219	145
15 March 2001	191	119
14 March 2001	171	113
13 March 2001	147	103
12 March 2001	133	97
11 March 2001	123	91
10 March 2001	113	84
9 March 2001	99	80
8 March 2001	85	66
7 March 2001	79	50
6 March 2001	69	48
5 March 2001	52	59
4 March 2001	48	55
3 March 2001	34	52
2 March 2001	23	43
1 March 2001	16	40
28 February 2001	10	28
27 February 2001	6	25
26 February 2001	3	14
25 February 2001	3	7
24 February 2001	1	4
23 February 2001	1	1
22 February 2001	1	1
21 February 2001	—	1
20 February 2001	—	1

Source:

MAFF Disease Control System database at 19:00 on 1 May

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has collated in the last two months of wildlife contracting foot and mouth disease; and how many cases there have been of wildlife being diagnosed as suffering from foot and mouth disease. [157039]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* There have been no laboratory confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease in wildlife species in the UK during the current outbreak (as of 4 May 2001).

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the last foot and mouth infected animals were burned at Layer-de-la-Haye, Essex; when disinfection of the infected farms will be completed; and when movement restrictions on surrounding farms will be lifted. [157246]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* The infected animals at the two separate sites at Layer-de-la-Haye were burned on 11 March and 23 March respectively, in both cases the day after slaughter. The State Veterinary Service completed all of the cleansing and disinfection work on the two farms by 24 April 2001. However subsequent blood sampling in the 3 km area resulted in the discovery of two seropositives and this has delayed the lifting of the Infected Area. All stock on the new farms involved have been destroyed and sent for rendering and an additional 3 km patrol area has been established.

Inspections and blood sampling in this new area should be completed by 3 May. Provided these are clear, it is hoped restrictions in the whole Colchester area could be lifted by next week.

The cleansing and disinfection of the new Dangerous Contact premises is under way but this should not affect the lifting of the Infected Area.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will issue guidelines to his Department's staff, dealing with foot and mouth disease in the areas affected, to ensure that neighbouring residents are informed if slaughtered carcases are to be burned near their homes. [157373]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* Methods for informing residents of burning sites in the neighbourhood are decided at a local level, and will include mail shots, consultation with relevant organisations and publicity through local press.

Safeguarding public health is the Government's overriding priority in handling the foot and mouth outbreak. The Department of Health has published detailed guidance on the disposal of carcases together with advice about the public health aspects of disposal, including burning.

All fires are being constructed following special guidance from the Government to minimise public health risks. As with any fire, however, smoke contains pollutants that will stay in the air for a short time. Local residents are therefore advised to avoid sustained exposure within the vicinity of pyres.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish his Department's assessment of the discovery on 31 January by French veterinarians of foot and mouth disease in sheep exported from Wales. [157483]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The circumstances were as follows. A consignment of 402 sheep was exported to France from premises in Wales on 1 February under an export health certificate that had been issued on 31 January. In early March, the French authorities blood tested 31 of the animals before slaughtering them. The French authorities have now informed us that the seven samples that initially showed positive results have now been re-tested with negative results. They have concluded that the initial serological positive reactions must be considered as false positives.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to make a statement on the easing of livestock movement in the Brentwood area of Essex; and what conditions must be met before such a statement can be made. [157956]

Ms Quin: The infected area status around Brentwood was lifted on 24 April 2001. This means that the Brentwood area becomes an 'at risk area' and farmers can now apply for licences to move their livestock to other similar areas in the country under the livestock movement schemes.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the D notices will be lifted in the Chorley constituency. [157521]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Form D notices are services on individual premises when an Inspector has reasonable grounds for suspecting an animal situated on the premises has been exposed to foot and mouth disease and where the premises are in a Protection Zone. These are withdrawn as soon as this is appropriate. The Protection Zone in the Chorley constituency is currently being reviewed and will be lifted as soon as possible in line with veterinary guidance.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the public health effects of the burning of old railway sleepers associated with the disposal of culled animals. [157890]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Emissions of pollutants from burning railway sleepers were considered as part of the Department of Health-led risk assessment on the health effects of air emissions from pyres. This Risk Assessment is available on the Department of Health's website. Railway sleepers form an important source of fuel for pyres. The sleepers may be treated with creosote and this will add to the range of pollutants emitted on burning. The emission of pollutants from sleepers was assessed by the Environment Agency and factored into the risk assessment. No separate assessment of the emissions from burning sleepers has been undertaken: the focus has been on the pyres as a whole.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what part illegal movements of animals have played in the spread of foot and mouth in the United Kingdom. [157784]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Illegal movements of animals are investigated by enforcement officers of the local authority and exceptionally by MAFF Investigation Branch and the police.

To date, although throughout the UK, rumours and suspicion of illegal movement is alleged, we have no evidence against which we can state that illegal movement has been proved to have led to any one particular case.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if a flock of sheep from Abermarle Barracks, Heddon-on-the-Wall, was slaughtered and buried prior to the outbreak at Burnside Farm. [158254]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* No. We are assured that no sheep have been present within Albermarle barracks for a number of years.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the incubation periods are for the known strains of foot and mouth virus; and if he will make a statement. [158726]

Ms Quin: The incubation period varies according to the infecting dose, the strain of virus and the susceptibility of the infected animal, both individual and species. It can be between two and 14 days, but certain strains of FMD virus serotype O circulating in Asia, including that in the UK, can have very short incubation periods in pigs, as short as 18 hours.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to ensure a consistent message is generated by all parts of the Government regarding foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [158730]

Ms Quin: The Government have at all times sought to provide the best possible information to Parliament, to farmers, to those on the ground fighting the disease, and to the public and the news media here and abroad.

In particular we have created an extensive dedicated website, set up a 24 hour a day helpline, co-operated with other Government Departments throughout the Joint Co-ordination Centre in MAFF and the News Co-ordination Centre (NCC) in the Cabinet Office. The NCC has provided two complementary websites and a general helpline. The No. 10 Downing street website has provided a multi-lingual service, and British Embassies and High Commissioners have provided information through local news media and their own local websites. Communication activity is among the topics co-ordinated by regular meetings of the Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBRA).

The Scottish Executive, the Northern Ireland Executive, and the National Assembly for Wales have provided similar information services, co-ordinated with these arrangements. In the English regions, my Department's offices have worked with the Central Office of Information (COI) and Ministry of Defence staff to provide full local services for the news media. My offices and the COI have also arranged direct communication with farmers and others.

We have reported to Parliament 10 times since the beginning of the outbreak on 20 February and my right hon. Friend the Minister has written to farmers on three occasions, put advertisements in the specialist press and written articles for several local and national newspapers. The Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Minister and a number of other Ministers have made many visits to disease-affected areas to meet local people and local news media.

The Office of Science and Technology provided science teams who visited the regions to explain the basis of the culling policy. The Ministry has also provided a mobile public information unit which supports local operations in explaining the details of the campaign to eradicate the disease.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has assessed the possibility that foot and mouth spreads as a result of the gases rising from the incineration of carcases in connection with the foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [158718]

Ms Quin: The Institute of Animal Health at Pirbright has recently produced a report, in collaboration with MAFF and the Meteorological Office, on the spread of the foot and mouth disease virus from the burning of animal carcases on open pyres. This report is to be published in the "Veterinary Record" shortly.

Six pyres, located in Devon, Exeter and Worcestershire, were monitored. Additional pyres are currently being investigated in Cumbria and Devon. The report concludes that early results indicated that breakdowns due to virus dispersion from pyres are unlikely to occur in general and the pyres analysed to date have shown no evidence that breakdowns due to this cause have occurred.

The Pirbright Institute of Animal Health has informed the Ministry that the virus is inactivated at temperatures above 50 degrees centigrade. There may be a small thermo-resistant element of the virus which is also destroyed at 70 degrees, but expert opinion is that this is likely to be insignificant in the possible spread of infection from pyres.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received about the results of the virology tests taken from livestock which were slaughtered upon suspicion by the French authorities, on the farm of M. Nozin, of Hameau le Fayed, St. Nicholas de Bliquetuit, France; when the sheep in question were in contact with foot and mouth disease, and by what means; on what date the sheep arrived in France; what evidence the Head of Veterinary International Trade for his Department has that the serological test results were due to false positive reactions; what testing procedures other than the FMD Elisa test can produce such results; and if he will make a statement. [158252]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* This consignment of sheep was exported to France by ferry on 1 February 2001. The French authorities have now informed us that the seven samples that initially showed positive results have now been re-tested with negative results. They have concluded that the initial serological positive reactions must be considered as false positives.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many appeals his Department has received from farmers against the slaughter of their livestock as part of his policy to control foot and mouth disease. [158264]

Ms Quin: As of 3 May, 17 cases are under consideration by MAFF in which farmers have engaged solicitors who have raised questions about the proposed slaughter of their stock. They all involve the contiguous cull policy before it was recently modified.

The legislation does not provide for a formal legal appeals procedure against slaughter although, of course, challenge by way of judicial review is always available to anyone. To date only one judicial review has been brought but it was discontinued by the applicant. MAFF policy is that if a farmer objects to having his stock slaughtered under the contiguous slaughter policy, a veterinary reassessment is performed. This takes into consideration all the representation made by the farmer and reviews the situation on the ground. A final decision is then taken by the local Divisional Veterinary Manager.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at what times and on what days of the week the foot and mouth helplines at each of his Department's offices are open to telephone calls from farmers and other members of the public; what plans he has to extend these hours; and if he will make a statement. [158259]

Ms Quin: The national foot and mouth disease helpline is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week to offer advice and assistance to farmers and other members of the public. The 24 Animal Health Divisional Offices (AHDOs) are open during normal office hours and the opening times have been extended according to the disease situation. Outside these hours a duty veterinary officer is available to provide emergency assistance.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what resources are available to him to test milk and blood samples for foot and mouth disease *(a)* in his Department, *(b)* in other Government Departments, *(c)* in places of education, *(d)* in the private sector and *(e)* elsewhere; and if he will make a statement. [158479]

Ms Quin: Milk is not routinely tested to confirm a diagnosis of foot and mouth disease (FMD). Tissue and blood samples for the diagnosis of FMD are tested in Great Britain only at the Institute for Animal Health laboratory in Pirbright. This is the world and EU community reference laboratory for FMD. The laboratory has the experience in this area, the trained personnel and uses internationally recognised, validated laboratory tests for FMD. It is licensed for this purpose by the Ministry, and operates under the very highest conditions of containment to ensure that there is no escape of infection from the laboratory premises.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the consistency of the application of the rules for identifying herds and flocks for contiguous culls to control foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [158476]

Ms Quin: The identification of contiguous premises and the culling operations carried out at such premises are managed locally but monitored centrally by headquarters staff of the State Veterinary Service. We are not aware of any significant inconsistencies in the application of policy in this area.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the advice given to those flying close to outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [158449]

Ms Quin: The Ministry may request the Civil Aviation Authority to impose restrictions for the purposes of disease control. Current instructions are that no flying is permitted below 500 feet for a radius of one nautical mile around certain infected premises. These restrictions apply to those infected premises where the risk of airborne transmission is considered to be high. For example, restrictions are imposed on infected premises with a significant number of pigs, due to the high levels of virus they excrete. The restrictions will be lifted as soon as slaughter is completed. There are also restrictions that apply to mass burial and cremation sites, with flying not permitted below 1,000 feet for a radius of two nautical miles around the site.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if auctioneers performing foot and mouth disease valuations are paid *(a)* a percentage commission of the valuation, *(b)* a fixed fee and *(c)* by other means. [158204]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The current agreement with the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers is for a fee structure of 1 per cent. per valuation, subject to a daily minimum fee of £500 and a daily maximum fee of £1,500.

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies he has commissioned on the lessons from the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease *(a)* in general and *(b)* relating to animal welfare; and if he will make a statement. [158488]

Ms Quin: There will undoubtedly be lessons to be learned from our experiences of the foot and mouth epidemic. How this can best be done will be considered later when the outbreak has been dealt with.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice has been issued to *(a)* the Jockey Club and *(b)* individual racecourses on the movement of horses into and out of foot and mouth disease restricted areas. [158392]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Horses are not susceptible to foot and mouth disease but may be involved in spreading infection in the same way as vehicles and people, by carrying material from an infected animal. For this reason, horses on infected farms cannot move off the farm until the restrictions are lifted. Guidelines have been issued for horse-riding, and some activities are prohibited in an infected area. These include hunting and point to point meetings.

The State Veterinary Service has carried out assessments of the risks of spreading foot and mouth disease by holding horse race meetings. Instructions and guidelines for horse racing have been issued by the Jockey Club and British Horseracing Board, in conjunction with MAFF. The Jockey Club and British Horseracing Board ensure that the conditions are enforced by individual racecourse. Detailed information, including the veterinary risk assessments, is also accessible on the MAFF website http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

Current veterinary advice is that no race meeting should be held within 3km of a confirmed or suspected case of foot and mouth disease. Horses are not permitted to enter a racecourse if they are from premises situated less than 1km of a premises on which foot and mouth disease has been confirmed in the previous 30 days.

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those establishments licensed for the training of racehorses which were situated within areas restricted under foot and mouth disease precautions on 9 April. [158390]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Ministry does not hold this information. Racehorse training yards are licensed by the Jockey Club.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans there are to cull farms between Priestweston and Marton Hill in the Shropshire/Powys area, in order to create a fire break against the spread of foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [158944]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* There are no plans to carry out any culls to produce fire breaks against the spread of foot and mouth disease in the Priestweston/Marton Hill area of Shropshire. The only culls that would take place are those on Infected Premises and on farms that would be identified as being contiguous to such premises, and on premises adjudged to be Dangerous Contacts.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what instructions have been given to *(a)* veterinary surgeons and *(b)* other departmental officials about the need to classify apparent cases of foot and mouth disease as suspicious rather than confirmed; and if he will make a statement; [158985]

(2) what post-slaughter assessment is made of stock slaughtered on suspicion of foot and mouth disease; where it is established that such stock was infected with foot and mouth disease, if it is his policy to reclassify such cases as a confirmed outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [158965]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 26 April 2001]:* On investigation for foot and mouth disease, veterinary inspectors can follow two courses of action. Being either satisfied on clinical grounds or suspicious that foot and mouth disease is present, the stock will be slaughtered and samples sent for testing. Stock on contiguous premises is also culled when disease has been confirmed on the premises under investigation. Slaughter on suspicion cases are confirmed as outbreaks if the laboratory results are positive. If a veterinary inspector is satisfied that the disease is not present, restrictions on the premises are lifted.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms have had animals slaughtered on suspicion of foot and mouth disease in *(a)* Worcestershire and *(b)* the United Kingdom; and how many animals have been destroyed in the course of the current outbreak. [158988]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Since the start of the outbreak of the 2001 epidemic of foot and mouth disease the following numbers of premises have had animals slaughtered on suspicion of foot and mouth disease.

	Farms	*Animals*
Hereford and Worcestershire	12	10,901
Great Britain[1]	141	72,000

[1] Does not include Northern Ireland

The total number of animals slaughtered since the start of the outbreak as of 1 May is 2,382,000 animals.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of ease of transporting *(a)* napalm and *(b)* timber and old tyres to avoid transport in connection with destruction of animal carcases. [158871]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Napalm produces very toxic compounds when burnt, and so cannot be used because of the public and environmental health risks. We have made no assessment of the ease of transporting napalm compared with transporting timber or old tyres.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy that railway sleepers and other materials not needed to be burned for purposes of disposing of animal carcases will be removed from burn sites on farms rather than being burned up. [159165]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Veterinary advice is that a risk assessment should be undertaken at the site to judge the severity of contamination of any unused pyre material. Railway sleepers and other materials will be disinfected and reused where possible, otherwise they will be burnt on site. Unused straw will always be burnt.

There are restrictions on moving materials from infected areas, so where pyre materials are re-used, any movements must be carried out under licence.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the current average compensation payment is for *(a)* a cow and *(b)* a sheep. [159176]

Ms Quin: The average compensation payable per animal up to 4 May is £916 for cattle and £110 for sheep.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the average compensation paid to livestock farmers is who have been affected by foot and mouth disease. [159177]

Ms Quin: Payments to farmers depend on the mix, numbers and valuation of their livestock and may be covered by more than one claim. The average compensation payable per animal up to 4 May is £916 for cattle, £110 for sheep and £89 for pigs.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will amend the rules allowing movements of animals to slaughter for human consumption from within infected areas to permit movements from premises under form D restrictions where there has been no recent nearby outbreak, subject to a veterinary inspection. [159722]

Ms Quin: New rules introduced on 3 May allow the movement of healthy animals direct to slaughter from within a Protection Zone, subject to certain conditions. Such movements provide for animals to leave the Protection Zone but not the infected area.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the current average compensation payment is for a pig. [159679]

Ms Quin: The average compensation payable up to 4 May for a pig is £89.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in respect of how many farms in Cumbria and Devon temporary veterinary inspectors have registered dissent over the operation of the contiguous cull. [159465]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* Records have not been kept in relation to individual farms. In both Cumbria and Devon when the policy was initially announced a number of temporary veterinary inspectors (TVIs) initially expressed disquiet with the presumption that cattle on contiguous farms would automatically be slaughtered. Subsequent clarification of the policy and the refinements announced on 26 April have been generally welcomed by the veterinary profession.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughtered on suspicion cases in *(a)* England and *(b)* Cumbria have not been concluded or finally classified. [159460]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* As of 22.00 hours on 3 May 2001, there were 21 cases in England of which 13 were in Cumbria.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list on a weekly basis per county since the foot and mouth epidemic began the number of cases classified as slaughtered on suspicion. [159457]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The information on cases currently classified as slaughter on suspicion is in Table 1. There were no cases which originated before 11 March.

Table 1: Cases currently classified as slaughter on suspicion

	Week ending								
County	*11 March*	*25 March*	*1 April*	*8 April*	*15 April*	*22 April*	*29 April*	*6 May*	*Total to date*
Avon	—	—	—	1	2	—	1	—	4
Berwickshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Cheshire	—	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	3
Cornwall	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Cumbria	2	1	3	1	2	8	—	5	22
Derbyshire	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	2
Devonshire	—	—	4	14	6	5	4	—	33
Dumfrieshire	—	—	3	4	1	1	3	—	12
Durham	—	—	1	—	3	4	4	1	13
East Lothian	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	2
Gloucestershire	—	—	7	3	2	2	—	—	14
Gwent	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	2
Gwynedd	—	—	3	—	—	—	2	—	5
Hereford and Worcester	—	—	2	3	6	1	—	—	12
Kent	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Kirkcudbright	—	—	1	1	2	1	1	1	7
Lancashire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Leicestershire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Northumberland	—	—	1	1	—	3	—	—	5
Powys	—	—	3	1	3	1	1	—	9
Roxburgh	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	2
Shropshire	—	—	2	1	2	—	—	—	5
South Yorkshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Staffordshire	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	4
Tyne and Wear	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
West Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Wigtown	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	2
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	3
Great Britain	2	1	42	33	34	28	21	8	169

A further 50 cases initially identified as slaughter on suspicion were subsequently reclassified as Infected Premises following clinical examination or testing. These are in Table 2.

Table 2: Cases initially classified as slaughter on suspicion and reclassified as Infected Premises

	Week ending							
County	*25 March*	*1 April*	*8 April*	*15 April*	*22 April*	*29 April*	*6 May*	*Total to date*
Cheshire	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	3
Cumbria	1	1	4	3	2	3	1	15
Devonshire	—	1	—	2	3	1	—	7
Dumfreshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Durham	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Gloucestershire	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	2
Gwent	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1

Table 2: Cases initially classified as slaughter on suspicion and reclassified as Infected Premises

	Week ending							
County	*25 March*	*1 April*	*8 April*	*15 April*	*22 April*	*29 April*	*6 May*	*Total to date*
Hereford and Worcester	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	3
Kirkcudbright	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	2
North Yorkshire	—	—	1	—	2	—	—	3
Northumberland	—	1	—	2	1	1	1	6
Powys	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	3
Shropshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Wigtown	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	2
Great Britain	3	8	9	11	12	5	2	50

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for *(a)* England and *(b)* Cumbria the number of (i) cattle and (ii) sheep which have been slaughtered from farms contiguous to infected premises. [159474]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The table shows the numbers of cattle and sheep slaughtered on premises contiguous to infected premises in England and Wales as at 19:00 on 2 May.

	Cattle	*Sheep*
England	73,832	327,179
Cumbria	6,980	43,382

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what his policy is on the use of raptors to keep foot and mouth disease landfill sites free of birds; [159278]

(2) if he will assess the benefits of using Wingaway dam cry bird scarers on foot and mouth disease landfill sites. [159277]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* Decisions as to whether to use raptors or bird scarers on foot and mouth disease landfill sites are for the individual operators managing the sites.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will discuss delays relating to the animal welfare cull of the stock belonging to Gareth Owen in Powys with the Intervention Board; and what information his Department has on the current condition of the animals. [159834]

Ms Quin: It is not practicable or appropriate to comment on individual cases under this scheme. Given full information on the animals and holdings concerned, the Intervention Board will be happy to respond to any queries.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with Ministers from other EU and European countries on the introduction of a regime for permanent use of vaccination against foot and mouth disease. [159513]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* None. There was a general discussion of foot and mouth disease at the informal meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers at Östersund on 8–10 April, at which some member states called for a reassessment of current EU policy but none advocated permanent use of vaccination against foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to apply the rate of compensation for animals slaughtered under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme prevailing at the time of his oral statement of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 456–59, to all animals *(a)* accepted and *(b)* entered for the scheme prior to his statement. [160100]

Ms Quin: The point of collection or slaughter on farm under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme is the point at which animals are entered into the scheme. The revised rates of payment under the scheme apply to animals collected or slaughtered on farm after midnight on Sunday 29 April. This includes animals that were the subject of applications made before 26 April.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to review each application under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme, and, where he is satisfied that animals will be slaughtered on or after 30 April as a result of errors made or delays caused by his Department or his agencies, to pay the higher rate of compensation prevailing before that date; and if he will make a statement [160075]

Ms Quin: We will give careful consideration to any complaints about the alleged mishandling of applications under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme. We will consider individual cases on their merits.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what instructions have been given to those slaughtering animals during contiguous culls about the report they should make and the steps they should take when they discover clinical symptoms of foot and mouth disease in the stock they are slaughtering; and if he will make a statement. [159849]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Normal suspect disease procedures apply when clinical symptoms of foot and mouth disease are discovered in stock being slaughtered during contiguous culling. The slaughtered animals are reported as confirmed on clinical grounds. The newly confirmed premises in turn becomes the centre for a circle of contiguous culling. The same also applies if samples taken from contiguously culled animals test positive for signs of the disease.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many reports were received of the illegal movement of livestock in *(a)* February, *(b)* March and *(c)* April. [159956]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* This information is not available in the format requested. Local authorities provide quarterly returns to the Ministry on levels of enforcement activity in England but the returns do not necessarily separate out work in response to reports of illegal movements of stock. However, in the period February to April, MAFF has been made aware of at least 230 reported illegal movements in England. MAFF is also aware of at least 73 such reports in Wales and eight in Scotland.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he has taken to reduce the spread of future outbreaks of foot and mouth disease that may occur after the present outbreak. [159955]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The statement by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 456–73, updated the House on a number of actions taken following an initial assessment of the origins and spread of the disease. The consultation on the proposed ban on pig swill closed on 10 April. 150 responses were received, almost all of which favoured a ban. A number of detailed issues were raised which are being considered urgently and an announcement on this is expected shortly. A large number of comments has been received on a proposed 20 day standstill period, after movements on farm, for sheep, goats and cattle. Because of the considerable interest in this issue, it has been decided to extend the consultation period for a further month from the initial deadline of 11 May. The cross-departmental examination of the controls on commercial and personal imports of meat and meat products is under way and a further announcement will be made in due course.

Mr. Curry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the efficiency of equipment to test live animals in the field for the presence of foot and mouth disease infection. [159822]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* All confirmatory diagnosis of foot and mouth disease infection is carried out at the Institute for Animal Health, Pirbright. The tests used are those recommended in the OIE Manual of Standards for Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines, plus additional tests under development. The equipment used in these tests is regularly serviced and maintained at the standard required by the tests used.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if wild deer with foot and mouth disease are capable of infecting the farm animals with which they come into contact. [R] [159945]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Our current veterinary risk assessment concludes that infected deer could transmit foot and mouth disease to susceptible livestock during the clinical stages of the disease. However the risk of wild deer playing any significant part in the spread of the disease is assessed as very low and feral deer are unlikely to represent a longer term risk. We therefore have no plans at this stage to control wild deer populations.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what stocks of foot and mouth vaccines his Department holds. [160381]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* The Department does not hold stocks of foot and mouth vaccine. However, contingency plans exist to draw sufficient doses from the International Vaccine Bank (IVB) and the EU Vaccine Bank (EUVB) to vaccinate some 750,000 cattle. This is available at short notice but, as the EUVB holds sufficient doses of appropriate vaccine for 2.5 million cattle, additional supplies are available from this source if required.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of each animal species slaughtered in the foot and mouth outbreak were *(a)* known to be afflicted with the disease, *(b)* suspected of being infected, *(c)* inhabited contiguous areas and *(d)* killed for welfare reasons. [160378]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* The numbers of pigs, sheep and cattle that have been slaughtered are broken down as follows (figures as at 19:00 2 May 2001):

	Cattle	*Sheep*	*Pigs*	*Goats/deer llamas etc.*	*Total*
(a) Animals slaughtered on infected premises[1]	249,000	690,000	22,000	400	961,400
(b) Animals slaughtered on suspicion	8,000	63,000	2,000	0	73,000
(c) Animals slaughtered on contiguous premises	89,000	406,000	28,000	800	523,800
(d) Animals slaughtered for welfare reasons	36,000	440,000	177,000	700	653,700
Animals slaughtered as other dangerous contacts	75,000	718,000	59,000	100	852,100
Total	457,000	2,317,000	288,000	2,000	3,064,000

[1] On infected premises, all animals are slaughtered. They are not tested individually for infection

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on *(a)* the potential of deer to catch foot and mouth disease, *(b)* the potential of deer to act as carriers of the disease and *(c)* plans he has to control deer suspected of *(a)* and *(b)*. [160644]

Ms Quin: All cloven-hoofed animals, including deer, are susceptible to foot and mouth disease. Wild deer tend to show mild or inapparent disease, resembling the disease in sheep, although some species, (eg roe deer and muntjak deer in the UK) may be severely affected. The age of the animal greatly affects the severity of the disease.

Deer can be carriers of the foot and mouth virus, and could transmit foot and mouth disease to susceptible livestock during the clinical stages of the disease. However, the Ministry's current veterinary risk assessment indicates that the risk of wild deer playing any significant part in the spread of foot and mouth disease is very low. There are therefore no plans at this stage to control wild deer populations, although as more information becomes available about the epidemiology of the disease in areas where there are wild deer, the risk assessment will be updated.

All samples that have been submitted to the Institute of Animal Health for testing, as of 4 May, have tested negative for evidence of the foot and mouth virus, antigens or antibodies.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to table proposals for reform of the EU's methods for tackling foot and mouth, following the recent UK outbreak. [160623]

Ms Quin: As my right hon. Friend the Minister reported to the House in his statement of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 456–73, at the Government's instigation the European Union will convene a conference later in the year to all aspects of our experience of the disease, in order to help shape control policy for the future.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 10 May 2001

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Walworth Church Commissioners Estate

Ms Harman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement about the future of the community of the tenants of the Walworth Church Commissioners estate in Southwark. [160749]

Mr. Stuart Bell: As my right hon. Friend will know, the Church Commissioners are consulting widely with interested parties over future letting policy in respect of a number of their residential estates, including that at Walworth in south London. The proposals forming the basis of consultation are, first, that the Commissioners will carry out a programme of improvements to the estates, and secondly, that over time, and for new tenants only, they will move to a mixture of affordable and market rents with the former being offered in future to key public service providers working in the local community.

That consultation is still in progress and includes seeking the views of residents groups, including the newly formed residents association on the Walworth estate. We have presented the proposals to some members of the association's committee and have been invited to give the same presentation at the inaugural meeting of the association on 15 May.

No decision will be taken until consultation has been concluded and the Commissioners have had a chance to consider the views of those affected by and close to the proposals.

Ms Harman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), representing the Church Commissioners, what the average rent level in tenancies is in the Walworth Church Commissioners estate in Southwark; and what assessment he has made of the average market rent levels in the Walworth area. [160748]

Mr. Stuart Bell: Properties at the Church Commissioners Walworth estate are let on a mixture of fair rents and assured tenancies, the former being applicable in the case of Rent Act tenancies granted before 1988.

The average rent levels (as at 4 May 2001) on the Commissioners Walworth estate in both cases, as compared with the equivalent estimated market rental values, are set out as follows:

Type of property	*Fair rent (£ per week)*	*Assured rent (£ per month)*	*Market rent estimates (£ per month)*
Bedsit	47.50	279	434
1 bedroom flat	53.00	337	650
2 bedroom flat	63.50	419	869
3 bedroom flat	68.00	485	1,210
4 bedroom flat	70.00	530	1,500
1 bedroom ½ cottage	53.50	345	534
2 bedroom ½ cottage	50.00	406	760
1 bedroom cottage	65.50	343	800
2 bedroom cottage	70.50	399	869
3 bedroom cottage	81.50	433	1,086

The total number of properties involved is 618.

Rent levels vary according to the condition of the property and there are too few properties within some categories to provide very meaningful averages but this has been done so far as is possible. There is only one two bedroom half cottage rented on a fair rent, it is unmodernised and hence the rent level is shown as less than the average charged for a one bedroom half cottage.

Market rents were estimated by a local property agent at the end of 2000.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the President of the Council on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158545]

Mrs. Beckett: I have travelled abroad in an official capacity on three occasions between these dates. On each occasion one of my special advisers has accompanied me.

The requirements of the Civil Service Management Code were met in each case.

DEFENCE

Military Equipment

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the procedure whereby military equipment which has become surplus to requirements is listed and described in order to give museums an opportunity to bid for the items, indicating when the existing procedure was instituted, how many artefacts have been so advertised to museums and how many bids have been *(a)* received and *(b)* accepted; and what changes are planned in the procedure. [160350]

Dr. Moonie: There are established procedures, introduced in March 1999, for the six principal service museums, the regimental and corps museums, the Imperial war museum, the science museum, the national maritime museum and museums sponsored by local authorities that have a clear defence interest allowing them to identify equipment that they may wish to acquire. If equipment identified is declared as surplus and gifting or loan is not an option, museums are invited to bid by the Disposal Services Agency (DSA) by means of competitive tender. Currently the DSA has 76 museums on their database covering interests such as aircraft and armoured vehicles. There are no changes planned in the procedure.

The DSA conducts most of its sales, however, via its marketing contractors and the museums are, of course, at liberty to approach these direct to purchase equipments. Details of equipments held are available through the DSA website and the subsequent links to its contractors.

The full number of tenders issued to museums and the number of museums successful with their tenders can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, for aircraft alone, two tenders have been issued to 66 museums since March 1999 and seven museums have been successful.

Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158558]

Mr. Hoon: Departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity on six occasions during the period 31 March 2000 to 31 March 2001.

There are no non-departmental special advisers.

Fylingdales/Menwith Hill

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent in each year since 1990 on upgrading the communications monitoring bases at *(a)* Menwith Hill and *(b)* Fylingdales; and from what budget line the money has been drawn. [160711]

Mr. Hoon: RAF Menwith Hill is an integral part of a worldwide communications network, which supports UK, US and NATO interests. Information on detailed operations at RAF Menwith Hill, including funding issues, is withheld under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information on the ground of national security.

The primary function of RAF Fylingdales is to provide the UK and US with early warning of a ballistic missile launch. It is not a communications monitoring base. The last upgrade of the early warning facilities took place in the early 1990s when the old "golf balls", which had become obsolete and difficult to maintain, were replaced with a modern solid state phased array radar. The UK Government contributed a total of £48 million to the costs of this upgrade, from the headquarters Strike Command budget. A yearly breakdown of this figure does not exist.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many exchanges of information have taken place between Her Majesty's Government and the United States Administration in respect of *(a)* Fylingdales and *(b)* Menwith Hill since May 1997. [160808]

Mr. Hoon: The UK and US regularly discuss the existing early warning and communication functions that RAF Fylingdales and RAF Menwith Hill respectively have performed for many years.

Defence Systems

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* people employed by his Department and *(b)* consultants working for his Department have (i) worked in the United States and (ii) co-operated with United States experts on defence systems deployable in space since May 1997. [160809]

Mr. Hoon: This information is not held centrally. Due to the wide range of defence applications which rely on the deployment of assets in space, it would be extremely difficult to derive the required information and, were it to be attempted, it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Security Policy

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make an assessment of the report of the Commission to Assess United States National Security Space Management and Organisation, presented to the Chairman of the Committee of Armed Services of the US House of Representatives on 11 January, in respect of the aspects which have implications for United Kingdom security policy. [160812]

Mr. Hoon: We are aware of the report and await the US Department of Defense response to it. The outer space treaty places important limitations on military activity in space without entirely prohibiting it. We do not want to see a general prohibition on military use of space because, for example, as confirmed in the Strategic Defence Review, we perceive a continuing needs for secure satellite communications for the armed forces. We do not support the further consideration of the use of outer space by the conference on disarmament in Geneva.

National Missile Defense

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will invite hon. Members to join the delegation to meet the defence envoys due to visit the United Kingdom to discuss national missile defense, announced by President Bush on 1 May. [160810]

Mr. Spellar: No.

Appointments (Age Limit)

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158128]

Dr. Moonie: The Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies. Consistent with this, there are no age limits on appointments made to public bodies sponsored by the Ministry of Defence, other than to the advisory committee on conscientious objectors. Appointments to this body are part-time judicial posts, appointed by the Lord Chancellor, and therefore abide by the Lord Chancellor's Department's general policy of normally considering for appointment only those aged between 35 and 62. The upper limit is set to take account of the retirement age for judicial office holders, which for part-time office holders is 65.

E-mail

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason his Department is revising its internal guidance to staff on writing and distributing e-mails; and if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's current internal guidance on e-mail procedures. [152053]

Dr. Moonie: Current Ministry of Defence (MOD) corporate policy and guidance concerning the use of e-mail is contained in two documents: Defence Council instruction (DCI) 156/00, which sets out policy and guidance on the use of e-mail, and DCI 272/00, which concerns conduct matters relating to the use of IT systems, including e-mail communications. In addition, most of MOD's IT systems have local operating procedures that may provide additional guidance for users.

MOD is in the process of producing a single publication covering all aspects of electronic working, including the use of e-mail. This will consolidate existing policy and guidance, update this in the light of our growing experience of electronic working and of recent legislation, as well as provide advice on best practice. Our aim is to improve MOD's working processes and the quality of life at work for our employees, as well as promote the efficient and effective management of information in defence.

I am arranging for copies of MOD's current policy documents on the use of e-mail, DCIs 156/00 and 272/00, to be placed in the Library of the House.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

GM Crops

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what baseline data are being used for monitoring purposes for each of the genetically modified trial test sites at Mathry, Pembrokeshire; [157572]

(2) what period elapsed between the baseline assessment date and subsequent assessment of the sites for genetically modified farmscale trials at Mathry, Pembrokeshire. [157573]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The design of the farmscale evaluations experiment does not require a pre-experiment assessment of baseline data other than pre-sowing seed sampling, which gives an indication of the potential for weeds to grow in the field. This is because the experiment is designed to compare effects of herbicide use between the two sides of each experimental field. One half is randomly selected and planted with the GM crop, while the other half is planted with the non-GM equivalent crop. This design allows for the effects of the herbicides on wildlife in the two halves of the field to be assessed more accurately than would be possible by comparison with wildlife in the crop before the start of the experiment.

The purpose of the farmscale evaluations is to examine whether there are any differences in the diversity and abundance of farmland wildlife associated with the use of GM herbicide tolerant crops with the herbicides to which they are tolerant, as compared with equivalent non-GM crops. We are also measuring the effects of geneflow. The wildlife found in crop fields is affected by factors such as the vegetation and crop type. Wildlife present in the bare field before sowing or in a previous, different, crop the year before will not be the same as that to be expected in the experimental crop. Measurements of differences in wildlife between a pre-trial audit and within the experimental crop during the experiment would therefore not allow the effects of the herbicide to be measured.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the impact on United Kingdom honey production of GM crops. [158504]

Mr. Meacher: Only extremely small amounts of GM pollen (less than one part per million) might arise in honey as a result of the present plantings of GM crops. This is considerably below the 1 per cent. threshold for labelling produce as containing GM material set out in the Novel Foods Regulations. The pollen from these particular crops has also been determined by Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment not to harm bees. Therefore, we believe that the current cultivation of GM crops should not affect honey production any more than conventional farming.

However, I am aware that some retailers have asked their honey suppliers to move hives away from GM crop trial sites and this may have an impact on production. There is therefore an important issue of liability for any damage to another farmer's, or in this case, beekeeper's ability to sell his produce. I believe that we need a liability provision in law whereby a GM farmer or any other type of farmer is made statutorily liable for any damage caused to neighbouring farmers or producers. We are working on a range of options for possible liability provisions of this type, in respect of any damage from GM crops. In the meantime, an individual who has suffered loss may be able to commence an action in the courts. Each case will turn on its own facts and the question of who is liable will be determined in the light of all the circumstances.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what steps he has taken to implement the inspector's recommendation at the public inquiry into the Birmingham northern relief road that the Lichfield and Hatherton canal restoration should not be compromised by the toll motorway; [160126]

(2) if he will provide match funding for the Lichfield and Hatherton canal restoration trusts to ensure restoration work can be completed during the construction of the Birmingham northern relief road. [160125]

Mr. Hill: The Secretary of State's decision on the inspectors report into the Birmingham northern relief road (BNRR) scheme was published on 27 July 1997. That letter placed obligations on the concessionaire, Midland Expressway Ltd. (MEL), in respect of the Lichfield and Hatherton canals. MEL is required to facilitate the full restoration works for the canals, waiving any consequential loss of tolls that these works may occasion. MEL is also required to provide, at its expense, the foundations for an aqueduct to carry the Lichfield canal over the BNRR and a pipe for an interim supply if the Lichfield and Hatherton canals restoration trust considers this necessary. MEL will meet these obligations in full.

Active discussions regarding the funding of the crossing are ongoing between the various parties involved. I will write to my hon. Friend once those discussions are complete.

London Underground

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the principle of reputational externalities is applied to the assessment of bidders for the London Underground PPP. [160530]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* In recognition of the size of the London Underground PPPs and the potential for alternative funding sources, the financial analysis of the PPP bids is based around a number of different scenarios, including ones that allow for a public sector bond-financed London Underground. Where appropriate, an adjustment representing the "reputational externality" is included in some of these scenarios. This is designed to capture the impact additional public sector borrowing would have on the Government's reputation for prudence and therefore on the risk premium demanded on sterling-denominated securities.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations Transport for London has made on the policy of preferred bidder status in relation to the London Underground; what control Transport for London will have over the preferred bidder when London Underground comes under the responsibility of the London Mayor; what aspects agreed prior to the transfer will be the sole responsibility of the contractor; and if he will make a statement. [160801]

Mr. Hill: I understand that Bob Kiley, Commissioner of Transport for London, wrote to Sir Malcolm Bates, then chairman of London Transport, on 27 April 2001 giving TFL's views on LT's proposed decision to select preferred bidders for the two deep tube PPP competitions. On 2 May, the LT board—after giving full and proper consideration to TFL's views—selected preferred bidders for these contracts. The preferred bidder for the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly Lines infrastructure company is Tube Lines. The preferred bidder for the Bakerloo, Central and Victoria Lines infrastructure company is Metronet.

On 4 May, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced that he had reached agreement with Bob Kiley on a way forward which will provide a secure basis for progressing the PPP. As a result of this agreement, Mr. Kiley will be appointed LT chairman and will lead negotiations with the bidders aimed at finding a way to meet his concerns on unified management within the framework of the PPP and the current procurement. The way forward protects the key objectives of achieving safety and value for money. The details of this agreement are set out in a memorandum of agreement, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the preferred bidder for London Underground and the public sector comparator; if the preferred bidder has been informed that the comparator must be favourable when the bid is assessed; what information is being given to the preferred bidder about the terms of the comparator; when it is expected to make the terms of the comparator public; and what his policy is in the event that the bidder receives an unfavourable assessment under the comparator. [160800]

Mr. Hill: The PPPs for London Underground are about delivering best value for both tube passengers and taxpayers. As such, we expect the LT board to sign PPP contracts only if they are satisfied that they represent value for money. They will be guided in this decision by the results of a rigorously designed and constructed public sector comparator. This has been made clear to both the preferred bidders for the deep-tube contracts.

A paper describing the methodology used by LT in constructing the comparator was placed in the House Library on 30 March 2000. This paper has been made available to bidders. I understand that LT also intends to make the results of the comparator publicly available once contracts have been signed. To publish the results of the comparator earlier than this would undermine LT's commercial position.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what negotiations he intends to have over the next month with leaders of the RMT trade union concerning strike action on the London Underground. [160718]

Mr. Hill: None. This is an operational matter for the union and London Underground to resolve between them.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much London Transport has spent to date on consultancy costs for London Underground public-private partnership. [161063]

Mr. Hill: I understand from London Transport that its expenditure on external consultants from 20 March 1998 (the date of the Government's announcement) to 31 March 2001, for work on the PPP and restructuring of London Underground, was £76.7 million.

Capital Projects (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the capital projects agreed in Shrewsbury and Atcham to improve *(a)* bus services, *(b)* train services, *(c)* cycle routes and *(d)* other public transport investments since 1 May 1997 and their cost; and if he will make a statement. [160511]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The local transport plan (LTP) submitted by Shropshire county council in July 2000 set out a strategy for five years to spend on:

integrated transport schemes (e.g. measures to improve local transport, reduce congestion, and promote walking and road safety);

local road maintenance and bridge strengthening schemes;

major public transport and road schemes costing over £5 million (e.g. integrated town centre improvements, new bus corridors, and local road schemes).

Authorities have discretion about which transport schemes to fund, in line with the Objectives, priorities and targets identified in the LTP, so it is not possible to list each individual project. However, I am pleased to say that over the five years from 1997–98 to 2001–02 the integrated transport plan for Shrewsbury has been allocated £3.86 million.

Access to Hastings Study

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the advice obtained by the Countryside Agency on the handling of the Access to Hastings study. [160899]

Mr. Hill: I understand that the Countryside Agency has commissioned a review of the access to Hastings multi-modal study. The agency is currently analysing the findings of the review and copies have been made available to my officials. This report will be made available in line with our open government policy.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the regulations which he plans to make under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in order to bring it into force; and what the target dates for making each set of regulations are. [160816]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Burgon) on 9 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 187W.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when paragraphs 6 and 7 of schedule 7 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 will come into effect. [160751]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Paragraph 6 of schedule 7 will insert a new section 34A into the Road Traffic Act 1988. This will enable a defence to a charge of driving a vehicle on certain classes of rights of way and land not forming part of a road, brought under section 34 of the 1988 Act (as amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), to be raised in limited circumstances. The effect of section 34A will be to restrict those who can put forward evidence to rebut a presumption created by section 34 that the right of way shown on the definitive map carries only the rights applicable to that class of way.

Provision has been made in section 34A for regulations to be made specifying additional circumstances in which such evidence can be put forward. We hope to consult on proposals for such regulations later this year.

Footpaths

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of footpaths are open in each local authority area in England; which authorities have applied for grant money to help with reopening of paths; how much money they have received; and if he will publish this information each week. [160815]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I refer to the answer I gave my hon. Friend on 3 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 754W. The Countryside Agency's website (http://www.countryside.gov.uk/footandmouth/) provides information about the reopening of rights of way for every local highway authority in England, including the percentage of the length of rights of way open in each area, where this information is available. The agency's website is continually updated.

I also draw my hon. Friend's attention to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 37W, and to my Department's press release on the same day which listed the percentage of public rights of way open for each county council area in England.

The Countryside Agency has so far received 47 applications for grants to help meet the costs of reopening paths, and has made offers of grant in response to these applications. A list of those authorities which have applied for grants and the amount of grant offered by the Countryside Agency are set out in the table. I shall provide further information on progress with the grant scheme in due course.

Rights of Way and Access Land Recovery Fund: Summary of applications received and grant offers as at 9 May 2001

Region/Authority	*Grant offer (£)*
North West	
Cheshire CC	28,875
Oldham	12,925
Lake District National Park Authority	45,000
Blackpool	7,013
Lancashire	7,026
North East	
North Tyneside	9,000
Darlington BC	7,500
Northumberland CC	20,353
Durham CC	52,155
Northumberland National park	15,750
City of Sunderland	4,800
South West	
Wiltshire CC	30,599
Cornwall CC	44,000
Devon CC	36,600
Dorset CC	35,625
Dartmoor National Park	33,765
North Somerset	10,500
South East and London	
Isle of Wight Council	22,500
Buckinghamshire CC	24,450
Kent CC	14,438
Oxfordshire CC	7,500
West Berkshire CC	10,594
Royal Borough Windsor and Maidenhead	11,625
East of England	
Cambridge CC	21,638
Hertfordshire	37,984
Norfolk CC	49,500
Yorkshire and the Humber	
Barnsley MBC	27,313
Yorkshire Dales National Park and Craven DC	25,122
North Yorkshire Moors National Park	11,475
Calderdale MBC	26,060
North Yorkshire CC etc.	24,776
Doncaster MBC	10,275
City of York	11,625
East Riding CC	17,262
Hambleton DC (via North Yorks CC)	3,582
West Midlands	
Warwickshire CC	45,000
Shropshire CC	25,875
Staffordshire CC	45,000
Telford and Wrekin CC	5,000
Worcestershire CC	32,250
Herefordshire CC	45,000
East Midlands	

Rights of Way and Access Land Recovery Fund: Summary of applications received and grant offers as at 9 May 2001

Region/Authority	*Grant offer (£)*
Leicestershire CC	34,000
Northamptonshire CC	8,588
Derbyshire CC	45,000
Peak District National Park	25,275
Nottinghamshire CC	13,986
Rutland CC	10,838
Total	1,095,017

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of senior grade civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160887]

Ms Beverley Hughes: There are no senior grade civil servants in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions who have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week.

Regional Impact Assessments

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 313–15W, on regional impact assessments, if the criteria taken into account by the regional co-ordination unit included *(a)* the availability of previously developed urban land from region to region and *(b)* other considerations of environmental capacity. [160795]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The criteria used by the regional co-ordination unit does not specifically include these considerations, which properly fall to the Departments and others putting forward proposals.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 313–15W, on regional impact assessments, if the large number of other initiatives referred to included *(a)* regional selective assistance and *(b)* funding for the regional development agencies. [160797]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The regional co-ordination unit has not assessed any initiatives which have included regional selective assistance or funding for the regional development agencies. The initiatives looked at were proposals for new area based activity.

Regional Planning Guidance

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to issue new regional planning guidance. [160842]

Ms Beverley Hughes: There is a rolling programme of review for regional planning guidance (RPG) and the table indicates the current position for each region.

The examination in public for the north-west RPG concluded in February 2001 and the panel's report is due next month. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will consult on proposed changes then proceed to issue final RPG. It is hoped that this process can be completed by the end of the year.

Reviews of regional planning guidance (RPG)

Region	*Draft RPG advice to Secretary of State*	*Public examination into RPG*	*Target for issue of revised RPG*
Eastern (RPG6)[1]	August 1998[2]	February 1999	November 2000[3]
North East (RPG1)	December 1999	June/July 2000	Autumn 2001
East Midlands (RPG8)	November 1999	June 2000	Summer 2001
South East (RPG9)[4]	December 1998	May 1999	March 2001[3]
South West (RPG10)	August 1999	March/April 2000	Summer 2001
West Midlands (RPG11)	Autumn 2001	Early 2002	Winter 2002–03
Yorkshire and the Humber (RPG12)	October 1999	June/July 2000	Summer 2001
North West (RPG13)	June/July 2000	February 2001	End 2001

[1] The entry against Eastern Region is for RPG6 covering East Anglia. Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire are covered by the review of the RPG for the greater South East region

[2] Issued for consultation by GO

[3] Issued

[4] The review of RPG9 covers London, the Government Office area for the South East and Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire

Notes:

1. Last updated 9 May 2000
2. Instead of non-statutory Regional Planning Guidance in London there will be a statutory spatial development strategy (SDS) for London following the establishment of the GLA. Hence there is no separate entry for London. The draft SDS is due to be submitted to the Secretary of State in early summer 2001. The public examination is due in early 2002 and the aim is to publish the final SDS in autumn 2002

Waste Management

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will respond to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affair's Committee's Fifth report of Session 2000–01, HC 36, on Delivering Sustainable Waste Management. [160820]

Mr. Meacher: It is normal practice to respond to a Select Committee report within two months of its publication. However, because of the forthcoming dissolution of this Parliament, the Government will be unable to respond within the normal time scale. It will now be for the incoming Administration to determine the terms of the response to the Committee's report.

Social Inclusion

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the funding programmes for social inclusion for which his Department is responsible that can be accessed by *(a)* national sports bodies and *(b)* local clubs and communities. [161009]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions manages a number of relevant funding streams, which I outline below. However, it should be noted that in all cases individual applications for funding will be judged on their own merits, and there are no DETR programmes which will guarantee support to particular organisations or projects.

The neighbourhood renewal community chests programme (£50 million over three years) will provide small grants to formal and informal local community groups in the 88 most deprived areas of England to support community self-help and mutual support activity. Introductory information has recently been published in the consultation document on funding community groups produced by the active community unit in the Home Office.

The community empowerment fund (£36 million over three years) will support community and voluntary sector involvement in local strategic partnerships (LSPs) in the 88 most deprived areas of England. Introductory information has been published by DETR as an annex to the LSP guidance.

National sports bodies would not be eligible for funding through either of these programmes.

The new deal for communities programme (£1.97 billion over 10 years) makes funding available to support regeneration in some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country. Projects to invest in local community centres and sporting facilities have featured in many of the partnerships' plans for turning around their neighbourhoods, and partnerships should also engage with all the relevant local organisations, including community groups and sports clubs.

The single regeneration budget (SRB) programme (£5.6 billion covering six rounds) could help the area or local branch of a national sports body with the costs of, for instance, setting up a local training facility that would benefit members of the local community. Local clubs and communities could also be eligible for funding through the SRB programme.

The European regional development fund (ERDF)—which is concerned primarily with economic regeneration—could also provide limited funding for local clubs and communities in relevant areas for capacity building projects, provided sports facilities could demonstrate a wider benefit (for instance, boosting local tourism) and therefore be considered good value. Details of local and regional programmes can be obtained from the Government offices for the regions.

Central Railway

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to receive the report of the Strategic Rail Authority into the proposed Central Railway project; and if he will publish that report. [160818]

Mr. Hill: I am confident that the Strategic Rail Authority will complete the review that it has commissioned into Central Railway's proposals in as timely a manner as possible. It will then be for the SRA to decide whether it wishes to publish a report.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the meetings held in the last 12 months between Ministers and the promoters of the Central Railway Project. [160817]

Mr. Hill: There have been no meetings between Ministers of my Department and Central Railway in the past 12 months. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade has had a number of private meetings with representatives of Central Railway in his capacity as the Member for Sheffield, Central.

A12

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* injuries and *(b)* deaths there were in each of the last 12 months for which statistics are available on the A12 between junctions with the M25 and A14; and what the key accident areas were on that stretch of road. [160717]

Mr. Hill: The table shows the number of deaths and injuries per month on the A12 between its junctions with the M25 and the A14 in 1999, the last 12 months for which national statistics are available. It has not been possible categorically to identify key areas of accident clustering.

	Deaths	*Injuries*
January	0	28
February	0	11
March	3	38
April	1	21
May	0	36
June	0	27
July	0	24
August	1	28
September	0	36
October	1	35
November	1	33
December	1	36

Wandsworth

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of Wandsworth's expenditure was met by *(a)* Government grant, *(b)* business rates and *(c)* council tax in the financial years 1979 to 2001. [160876]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The information requested for Wandsworth is as follows. Information prior to 1993–94 is not currently available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	Total grant		*Business rates*		*Council tax*	
	£000	*Percentage*	*£000*	*Percentage*	*£000*	*Percentage*
1993–94[1]	173,675	75	55,053	23.8	28,282	12.2
1994–95[1]	175,235	61.5	52,063	18.3	18,290	6.4
1995–96[1]	164,728	69.2	55,286	23.2	37,084	15.6
1996–97[1]	150,455	59.4	62,062	24.5	37,098	14.6
1997–98[1]	151,638	66.6	57,873	25.4	33,989	14.9
1998–99[1]	147,486	61.5	60,590	25.3	22,238	9.3
1999–2000[1]	153,096	62.2	65,496	26.6	27,222	11.1
2000–01[2]	151,704	58.6	73,719	28.5	28,425	11.0
2001–02[2]	164,243	59.7	72,732	26.5	33,476	12.2

[1] Outturn

[2] Budget

Notes:

1. Council tax is gross of Council Tax Benefit Grant and Council Tax Transitional Relief Grant.
2. Percentages do not add up to 100 per cent. due to use of reserves etc.
3. Comparison between years may be affected by changing responsibilities, in particular creation of GLA in 2000–01.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to allow access to and from motorways for heavy goods vehicles to access local sites. [160814]

Mr. Hill: No. In the interests of safety and the free flow of traffic, it is essential to make severe restrictions on the number of motorway accesses. All accesses allowed to motorways must be by strategically located fully designed grade-separated junctions—normally from other trunk roads, major local roads, motorway service areas, or maintenance compounds. Exceptionally, accesses can be provided for other major transport interchanges such as airports.

Hybrid Fuel-cell Vehicles

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* support and *(b)* incentives the Government have provided for an early introduction of hybrid fuel-cell vehicles. [160914]

Mr. Hill: The £30 million "Powershift" programme, which is sponsored by my Department, is currently supporting several projects to demonstrate hybrid and fuel-cell vehicles. The Government have also set up the £9 million new vehicles technology fund to support the introduction of technologies such as fuel-cell and hybrid vehicles offering significant environmental benefits. Additionally, new purchasers of fuel-efficient cars, including hybrids, since 1 March qualified for lower rates of vehicle excise duty. Owners of electric vehicles—including fuel-cell vehicles—have since 1 April qualified for zero VED.

The Government plan to publish a consultation document in the summer, on "Powering Future Vehicles", discussing and inviting comment on further steps that Government should take to promote the development and introduction of hybrid and fuel-cell vehicles in this country.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has made to LPG companies regarding their pricing system with particular reference to the variations in price from area to area. [160908]

Mr. Hill: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs at column 307W.

Ofgen

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has made to Ofgen about the treatment of CHP in Ofgen's review of the initial impact of NETA. [160798]

Mr. Meacher: The Minister for Energy asked Ofgen to undertake a review of the initial impact of NETA on smaller generators based on its first two months of live operation. I have made clear to the chief executive of Ofgen the importance which I attach to an early and successful outcome to the review, so that the concerns which CHP generators are expressing about the impact of NETA are thoroughly addressed. CHP has significant environmental benefits, and we need to ensure that its full potential can still be realised within the context of NETA. As part of the CHP strategy, which we will issue for consultation later this year, we will also examine other ways of ensuring that our target of 10,000MW of installed CHP capacity is met by 2010.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish *(a)* the projections of the cost per tonne of carbon saved and *(b)* the absolute carbon saving projections for (i) renewable energy, (ii) domestic energy efficiency and (iii) combined heat and power as originally outlined on pages 17 and 46 of the 1998 DETR document, the UK Climate Change Programme: Consultation paper. [160799]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have not updated the general costs per tonne of carbon saved that were included in the 1998 climate change consultation paper. We produced a qualitative assessment of the costs and benefits in the UK's climate change programme that was published in November 2000. The Government will consider whether it is possible to re-assess the costs per tonne of carbon saved from each policy in the future, as part of the formal evaluation of the climate change programme in 2004–05. The results of this evaluation will be published.

The climate change programme included estimated carbon savings for all those policies for which savings could be quantified. We estimate that delivery of the Government's target to provide 10 per cent. of the UK's electricity from renewable energy, as against around 5 per cent. that might otherwise have been achieved, could bring savings of 2.5 MtC in 2010. Extensive discussions about the potential costs and benefits of domestic energy efficiency confirmed that a range of simple measures could save up to 2.7–3.8 MtC per year by 2010. The UK's current CHP capacity of around 4,700 MWe is estimated to save around 4 MtC per year. The carbon savings from increased use of CHP are reflected within those for a range of other policies within the programme, particularly the climate change levy, climate change agreements and community heating.

GM Maize

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which EU country gave part C consent for GM maize, under European Directive 90/220/EC; on what date the consent was given; and to whom. [160720]

Mr. Meacher: European member states have given Part C consent, under European Directive 90/220/EC, to four types of GM maize. One is for importation and processing only. The other three are for importation and cultivation in the European Union (EU).

The genetically modified (GM) maize in the farm-scale evaluation programme is known as T25 maize (consent reference number—C/F/95/12/07). The French competent authority received the initial application for part C approval of T25 maize in 1995, which was for both commercial cultivation and for importation. Following consideration by other member states, the French granted formal approval for T25 maize on 3 August 1998, to AgrEvo France. This company is known as Aventis CropScience UK in the UK.

Planning

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the House of Lords' judgment in the recent cases involving planning and human rights. [161064]

Mr. Raynsford: We welcome this judgment. These cases, involving the ability of the Secretary of State to make decisions on planning schemes, are of great importance to the planning system and have wide implications. The House of Lords today unanimously upheld the Secretary of State's role under the planning Acts and have found no breach of article 6 of the european convention on human rights. They found that there is no incompatibility between the Secretary of State being responsible for formulating planning policy as well as for taking decisions in individual cases. He is democratically accountable to Parliament and, through the process of judicial review, to the courts. They found that article 6 is satisfied. Planning cases in the pipeline will continue to be handled in the normal way.

Cleansing Services Group

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports he has received from the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive concerning the incident at the Cleansing Services Group Ltd. site at Sandhurst in Gloucestershire on 30 October; and if he will make a statement. [161071]

Mr. Meacher: I have today placed in the Library copies of the progress report the Deputy Prime Minister has received from Sir John Harman, chairman of the Environment Agency, on the incident that occurred on 30 October at the CSG Ltd. facility at Sandhurst. The report has been compiled jointly by the agency and the Health and Safety Executive. It advises that, while no form of contamination has been found off-site that might be hazardous to human health or the environment and there is no risk to the food chain, some local residents have reported symptoms some time after the fire. The report also confirms that the investigation by the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive into criminal offences that may have been committed is on-going.

I understand the concerns of local residents about the incident and their calls for a public inquiry. The Prime Minister made it clear in his response to a question from the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 25 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 296, that we would make a determination as to whether there should be a full public inquiry as soon as we received this report. I am now giving the matter urgent consideration and expect to make an announcement in due course.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if Green Ministers have agreed on the details of a target on purchasing electricity from renewable sources. [161074]

Mr. Meacher: I am pleased to announce that the Green Ministers Committee has agreed the following target:

> All departments will ensure that, by 31 March 2003, at least 5 per cent. of their electricity comes from renewable sources that are exempt from the climate change levy, or from self generation, provided this does not entail excessive cost. This will rise to at least 10 per cent. supply from such sources by 31 March 2008, but will be reviewed after 31 March 2003, to take account of market conditions following the introduction of the renewables obligation.

The review of 2003 will include consideration of increasing or bringing forward the target.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

GCSEs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out the percentage of pupils gaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C for each of the schools in an Excellence in Cities area for *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000. [158849]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Every mainstream secondary school in the authorities listed benefits or will benefit from the Excellence in Cities programme. In addition, smaller groups of school—including secondary schools—will benefit from inclusion within the new excellence clusters.

Schools in the first 25 phase 1 EiC authorities came on stream from September 1999 (academic year 1999–2000), those in the 23 phase 2 authorities from September 2000 (academic year 2000–01), and schools in the 11 phase 3 authorities (including North Sefton) and 11 excellence clusters will begin implementing the programme from September 2001 (academic year 2001–02).

I refer the hon. Member to the secondary school performance tables published by my Department for information on individual school achievements. Overall, the proportion of pupils in EiC phase 1 partnerships achieving five or more GCSE/GNVQ grades A*-C rose by 2.3 percentage points between 1999 and 2000, compared with an average increase of 1.3 percentage points for all other maintained schools in England.

Local Education Authorities in the Excellence in Cities Programme

Barking and Dagenham
Barnsley
Birmingham
Blackburn with Darwen
Blackpool
Bradford
Brent
Bristol, City of
Camden
Coventry
Croydon
Cumbria
Doncaster
Ealing
Enfield
Gateshead
Greenwich
Hackney
Halton
Hammersmith and Fulham
Haringey
Hartlepool
Hounslow
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Kent
Kingston Upon Hull, City of
Kirklees
Knowsley
Lambeth
Lancashire
Leeds
Leicester
Lewisham
Liverpool
Luton
Manchester
Middlesbrough
Newcastle upon Tyne
Newham
North Tyneside
Nottingham
Oldham
Portsmouth
Redcar and Cleveland
Rochdale
Rotherham
Salford
Sandwell
Sefton
Sheffield
Solihull
South Tyneside
Southwark
St. Helens
Stockton-on-Tees
Stoke-on-Trent
Sunderland
Tameside
Tower Hamlets
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Westminster
Wirral
Wolverhampton

Source:

DfEE Register of Educational Establishments

Child Care Places (Slough)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* nursery and *(b)* after-school child care places were available in Slough in (i) April 1997 and (ii) April 2001. [160787]

Ms Hodge: In January 1997, 1,790 early education places for three and four-year-olds were taken up in the Slough local education authority area. By January 2000, this had increased to 2,434. Figures for the numbers of early education places for three and four-year-olds taken up in January 2001 are not yet available.

From September 1998, all four-year-olds have been able to access a free, part-time, early education place, From autumn 2004, all three-year-olds in England will also be entitled to a free early education place, if their parents want one.

We are unable to show statistics for out of school child care places prior to January 1999. In January 1999, there were 54 out of school child care places in group-based care in the Slough area. There was a slight decline in the year to January 2000 but we have yet to receive the figure for January 2001. Furthermore, 1,130 out of school places in both group-based care and with child minders are planned to be created between April 2001 and March 2004. Data for January 2001 are not yet available.

Key Stage 2

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of pupils achieved *(a)* 25 per cent. or less, *(b)* 26 to 50 per cent., *(c)* 51 to 75 per cent. and *(d)* 76 per cent. and above in each of the main key stage 2 tests in each of the last three years. [160685]

Jacqui Smith: Key stage 2 test results are analysed and reported in terms of levels of a pupil's attainment rather than as marks or percentages. The marks from which the levels are derived are not appropriate for comparisons over time, because of the variations in the tests. National curriculum levels are set in a way that aims to ensure consistency of standards over time and therefore provide a sound basis for such comparisons.

Private Schools

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many, and what percentage of children in secondary education were in private schools *(a)* in each English local education authority and *(b)* in England as whole in (i) the latest year for which figures are available and (ii) each of the two preceding years. [160618]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

The annual schools' census collects information on pupils in independent schools educated in those schools, regardless of where the pupils live. Therefore, information is not available on the area of residence of pupils in independent schools and which local education authority would be responsible for them. Areas have different densities of independent schools which would lead to an over estimate of the proportion of pupils in independent schools in some areas.

Also, independent schools are not classified as primary or secondary.

Further Education Colleges

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the total value of the moneys clawed back from further education colleges was in the year 2000–01; how much of this money was re-allocated to further education; and if there is a plan to use it to increase the value of the units for 2001–02 by a fixed amount. [160523]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) recovered £145 million from further education colleges where student numbers were not at the expected level in its last financial year 2000–01 and re-allocated £100 million to further education colleges. Where student numbers have gone up, the FEFC's successor, the Learning and Skills Council, will be considering reallocation of further funds in due course. There are no plans to increase the value of units for 2001–02 by a fixed amount.

Nursery Places (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each nursery school in Shrewsbury and Atcham *(a)* the funding received and *(b)* the number of free nursery places created since 1 May 1997 for (i) three-year-olds and (ii) four-year-olds; and if he will make a statement. [160521]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Data regarding funding and number places for each individual nursery school are not held centrally.

Since 1997, however, a total of 1,639 new early education places have been created for three and four-year-olds in all settings in the Shropshire local education authority area. Since September 1998, all four-year-olds have been able to access a free, part-time early education place.

In 2001–02, Shropshire LEA has been allocated sufficient funding to create a further 748 new early education places for three-year-olds. By September 2004, all three-year-olds in England will be entitled to a free early education place, if their parents want one.

The funding available to Shropshire for early years education and child care since 1997 is shown in the following table.

£

Year	*Child care funding*	*Early Years Funding (SSA and Nursery Education Grant)*	*Total*
1997–98	n/a	4,336,632	4,336,632
1998–99	70,000	5,638,935	5,708,935
1999–2000	199,200	5,863,664	6,062,864
2000–01	296,400	6,520,177	6,816,577
2001–02	1,168,690	7,268,624	8,437,314

Notes:

1. Figures for 1997–98 show the position before boundary changes took effect and include Telford and Wrekin. Figures for later years are for Shropshire only, without Telford and Wrekin.
2. Figures for 2001–02 are estimates only.

Education Provision (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much it cost to replace a demountable classroom for the Bayston Hill Music and Arts Centre in Shrewsbury; and if he will make a statement. [160518]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* £71,991 was allocated to this project under the third phase of the New Deal for Schools programme in 1999–2000. This was the total estimated cost of the project. Shropshire local education authority will be able to advise the final cost of the project.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much it cost to provide additional classrooms at *(a)* Sundorne infants, *(b)* Greenfields primary and *(c)* Springfield infants schools in Shrewsbury and if he will make a statement. [160517]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The Government have allocated £80,000 and £88,000 respectively to Greenfields primary and Springfield infants schools, to provide additional accommodation as part of the infant class size initiative. Although capital funding has not been provided for an additional infant classroom at Sundorne infants, I understand that remodelling of existing accommodation has enabled the school to extend its nursery unit. The cost of that work, some £34,000, was supported by the school and the local education authority.

The Government pledged to limit infant classes to 30. We have already delivered that pledge early for the vast majority of infants, including those in the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency. This has been achieved with the help of substantial funding made available under the class size initiative—allocations to Shropshire LEA alone amount to some £3.5 million.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list which schools in Shrewsbury and Atcham will benefit from the special Educational Needs Standards Fund; and if he will make a statement. [160515]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* We have made £82 million of supported expenditure available through the special educational needs standards fund in the current year (2001–02). This compares to £55 million in 2000–01. The allocation for this year for Shropshire LEA is £370,016.

The fund can be used for a range of activities including training for staff in special educational needs, improvements in speech and language therapy provision for children with communication difficulties, the provision of information and advice to parents, and the greater inclusion of children with special educational needs in the mainstream.

Information is not collected on how money is distributed by LEAs between schools. It is for individual LEAs to decide how they will use their grant but we expect them to work in partnership with their schools when deciding their special educational needs priorities.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the schools in Shrewsbury and Atcham that have received new computer suites since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [160509]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The Department does not hold information on the number of new computer suites in schools. However, since 1998 the average number of pupils per computer in primary and secondary schools in England has improved from 17.6: 1 to 12.6: 1, and from 8.7: 1 to 7.9: 1, respectively. Shropshire LEA estimates that £663,770 of national grid for learning funding has been allocated to schools in Shrewsbury and Atcham through the standards fund since 1997.

Class Sizes (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many school classes of five to seven-year-olds with over 30 pupils there were in Shrewsbury and Atcham in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [160508]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The available information is shown in the following table. Information on class sizes by parliamentary constituency is not available prior to 1997.

Shrewsbury and Atcham parliamentary constituency

	Number of:	
Year	*Key stage 1 classes with 31 or more pupils*	*Pupils in key stage classes of 31 or more*
1997	20	648
1998	18	577
1999	9	285
2000	4	125
2001[1]	0	0

[1] Provisional

Note:

Classes taught by one teacher

The Government pledged to limit infant classes to 30. We have already delivered that pledge early for the vast majority of infants, including in the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency. This has been achieved with the help of substantial funding made available under the class size initiative—allocations to Shropshire LEA alone amount to some £3.5 million.

Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the capital projects and their value at Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [160506]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The college has had two capital projects: the refurbishment of a building to provide a new performing arts centre by relocating the catering outlet at a cost of £468,000; and various accessibility works including a kitchen and toilet suitable for people who have disabilities, a new entrance and access ramps at a total cost of £64,999.

The Government have made available capital funding of £140 million in this financial year for the further education sector and a further £164 million and £256 million for the sector over the next two financial years respectively.

Individual Learning Accounts

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures have been introduced to promote individual learning accounts in the workplace. [160305]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Everyone aged 19 or over is entitled to open an individual learning account (ILA), including those in the workplace, provided their choice of learning is not graduate or post-graduate level and is not sports or leisure related.

Our approach has been to work with and through influential employer bodies such as the TUC, Small Business Service (SBS), the national training organisation (NTO) network and Campaign for Learning in promoting ILAs to employees.

A number of innovative approaches have been developed. These include the small firm learning account (SFLA), a pilot scheme offering additional funding to employees in small businesses. There are also more than 40 union learning fund (ULF) projects run by trade unions, which involve the promotion of ILAs, and their use, as tools for engaging people in the workplace.

Reconditioned Computers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people on low incomes have *(a)* bought and *(b)* leased a reconditioned computer under the scheme announced in March 2000. [160216]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* No new schemes were specifically announced in March 2000, but the Department is running a number of relevant schemes, such as computers within reach, wired-up communities and other small-scale pilots. So far, 6,000 computers have been made available in the pilot areas in which the schemes are taking place. Contractors currently have lists totalling 19,000 clients, who have already been assessed for their eligibility for the schemes and who will receive their computers over the next few months.

There are also plans to allocate further PCs in addition to the number indicated above and we are currently reviewing the approach to distributing recycled computers in the light of experience so far of these schemes.

Refrigerants

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which London headquarters premises owned or leased by his Department use *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons and *(b)* hydrochlorofluorocarbons for refrigeration and other relevant energy needs. [160019]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The information is as follows:

(a) Chlorofluorocarbons are no longer used by the Department; and

(b) Some hydrochlorofluorocarbons are still in use for refrigeration and air conditioning at both of the Department's London buildings.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what his Department's policy is regarding the purchase of *(a)* hydrocarbons and *(b)* other environmentally benign refrigerants to meet the refrigeration and other relevant energy needs of buildings and premises owned and leased by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [160017]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* It is the Department's policy to use environmentally preferable refrigerants wherever practicable, and to continue to explore other environmentally benign alternatives.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to what extent his Department's headquarters buildings use hydrofluorocarbons for *(a)* refrigeration and *(b)* air conditioning; what amounts of hydrofluorocarbons have been purchased in each year since 1995; and what plans he has to phase out the (i) purchase and (ii) use of hydrofluorocarbons. [160011]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* My Department's headquarters buildings use hydrofluorocarbons in *(a)* kitchen and tea point refrigerators and *(b)* air conditioning or air cooling systems at three buildings. Information on the amounts of hydrofluorocarbons purchased since 1995 is not collected in the form requested. It is the Department's policy to avoid the purchase and use of hydrofluorocarbons in favour of environmentally preferable substitutes wherever possible.

Music Standards Fund

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what the average amount of money allocated to each pupil from the music standards fund is in the current year; [159189]

(2) how much money per pupil was allocated to each unitary authority in Berkshire from the music standards fund in 2001–02; [159190]

(3) what formula was used to determine the allocation to local education authorities from the music standards fund for 2001–02. [159188]

Jacqui Smith: Until last year, the music standards fund was based on a system that allowed LEAs to bid for funding. From this year, LEAs will be allocated funding on a formula based on a free school meals deprivation factor. We expect £10 million of the Government's contribution to be matched equally by LEAs. The matched funding was frozen at 2000–01 levels so that no LEA should pay more in matched funding, and no LEA would receive less grant for music than in 2000–01.

The Government's grant of £50 million is broken down in two ways; £25 million was allocated based on the number of schools (primary, secondary, special and PRU) in each LEA, ie the £25 million was divided by the total number of schools in all the LEAs and distributed to each LEA pro rata. The remaining £25 million was allocated according to the full-time equivalent (FTE) number of pupils in those schools multiplied by the mean free school meals FSM percentage for each LEA.

Based on this formula, if the allocation to an LEA is lower than previously, we would protect the allocation based on last year's figures. In the case of Berkshire, all the unitary authorities received protected funding, as their allocations calculated by need would have been lower than their previous bids.

The overall amount per full-time equivalent (FTE) pupil in England is £7.86. The table sets out the music standards fund allocations and the amount per FTE for the Berkshire unitary authorities:

LEA	*FTE of pupils in all maintained schools*	*DfEE grant (£000)*	*LEA matched funding (£000)*	*Programme total (£000)*	*Programme total*	*Amount per FTE pupil (£)*
867 Bracknell Forest	15,081	111.8	25.0	136.8	136,760	9.07
868 Windsor and Maidenhead	18,631	178.0	0.0	178.0	178,000	9.55
869 Newbury (West Berkshire)	23,736	201.1	6.1	207.1	207,100	8.73
870 Reading	16,854	81.0	0.0	81.0	81,000	4.81
871 Slough	18,546.5	129.0	92.0	221.0	221,000	11.92
872 Wokingham	23,526	190.0	0.0	190.0	190,000	8.08
England	7,558,954.5	59,379	—	—	59,379,397	7.86

Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158560]

Mr. Wills: Between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 one of my departmental special advisers travelled abroad in an official capacity on one occasion.

All overseas visits comply with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Employment (Disabled People)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many disabled people are seeking work. [158103]

Ms Hodge: Figures on jobseeking activity are currently available only for adults of working age. The latest labour force statistics indicate that 345,000 people who are disabled are actively seeking work. Figures from the Labour Force Survey also indicate that around 400,000 people on incapacity benefits would like to work, and could work, given the right level of support.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention (Devon)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on levels of teacher recruitment and retention in Devon. [153175]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 March 2001]:* Teacher recruitment and wastage are as follows:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–1999*[1]
Recruits	860 (10.0%)	1,000 (11.6%)	1,040 (11.7%)
Wastage	800 (9.2%)	790 (9.1%)	700 (8.0%)

[1] Provisional

Notes:

1. Figures in brackets are estimated rates.
2. Some part-time teachers may be omitted from the numbers above if they were not members of the Teachers Pension Scheme.

The number of regular teachers (excluding short-term supply) in the maintained schools sector in England at January 2001 was 410,300, the highest since 1984 and 12,600 higher than January 1998.

There was a growth of 2,300 in the number of people recruited to train as teachers between 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the first such increase since 1992–93.

From April 2001 new graduate recruits can expect to earn £17,000 a year (up 6 per cent. from the previous year) and starting salaries in inner London will rise to £20,000 (up 9 per cent. from the previous year).

TREASURY

Objective 1 Funding

6. **Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the delivery of funds to EU Objective 1 regions. [159879]

Mr. Timms: The Single Programme Document process at the start of the Objective 1 period is one of a number of measures to ensure efficient and effective delivery. I am pleased that there is good progress in Cornwall, where, after just a few months in a seven-year programme, £39 million of grant has been approved—13 per cent. of the total.

National Changeover Plan

8. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total level of expenditure incurred to date by Government bodies in connection with the national changeover plan. [159884]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Details of expenditure on national changeover planning were included in the Fourth Report on Euro Preparations, published on 6 November 2000. Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House.

The Government will provide an updated breakdown of public sector spending in the next progress report, which will be published later this year.

Fuel Smuggling (Northern Ireland)

16. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was obtained by seizures of smuggled road fuel in Northern Ireland during the financial year 2000–01; and what the total estimated loss in revenue from cross-border fuel smuggling in Northern Ireland was during this period. [159894]

Mr. Timms: The amount of fuel seized in 2000–01 was more than double the previous year, safeguarding revenue of over £850,000. Customs does not have an estimate for revenue lost specifically from cross-border fuel smuggling for this period, but the number of vehicles seized was tripled last year through the enhanced enforcement action, and the number of laundering plants hit rose more than fivefold.

NHS (Investment)

17. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the Government's plans to invest additional resources in the NHS this year. [159895]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Before the 2001 Budget the Chancellor received many representations from professional organisations, trade bodies, members of the public and Members of Parliament on a wide range of issues, including the NHS. In the Budget, the Chancellor announced additional resources for the NHS in England of £300 million, £295 million and £240 million in the period 2001–02 to 2003–04 over and above the significant increases already announced in the 2000 Spending Review. These investment plans have been widely welcomed as the basis for the strategy of investment and reform set out in the NHS Plan and the Department of Health's public service agreement targets.

20. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans for spending on the health service in each of the next three years. [159898]

26. **Mr. Prosser:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for investment in the national health service over the next four years. [159906]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Total net NHS expenditure in the UK is planned to reach £69.5 million by 2003–04, representing an annual average increase of 5.7 per cent. in real terms over the period 2001–02 to 2003–04. Plans for future years will be set in the next spending review. In England these plans support the strategy of investment and reform set out in the NHS Plan and the Department of Health public service agreement targets. Key priorities include cutting waiting times, tackling health inequalities and investing in world-class hospitals and equipment.

Saving Incentives

18. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to encourage low-income households to save. [159896]

Dawn Primarolo: On 26 April, building on the success of the ISA in encouraging a wider group of people to save more, the Government announced a consultation on two new proposals to encourage saving and the build-up of assets, the Saving Gateway and the Child Trust Fund. The Saving Gateway would encourage lower-income earners to save by offering to match savings with contributions from the Government. The Child Trust Fund would offer all families an account in which to save for their children, with every child from birth receiving an endowment from the Government to start the build-up of assets.

Eurozone

19. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the abilities of eurozone countries to withstand a downturn in the US economy and the consequent impact on jobs in the United Kingdom. [159897]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government continue to monitor the downside risks facing the global economy closely. With low, stable inflation and sound public finances, the British economy is now much better placed to face global risks than before, and to continue to deliver sustained growth.

Business Environment

21. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the impact of his policies on the business environment; and if he will make a statement. [159899]

Mr. Timms: The Government's central economic objective is to achieve high and stable levels of growth and employment. Over the past four years the Government have been determined that we will not return to the damaging cycle of boom and bust, which in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw interest rates rise to 15 per cent. for a whole year; and because of the choices we have made we now have the lowest inflation for 30 years, the lowest long-term interest rates for 35 years, and the lowest unemployment since 1975.

We will not take this hard-won stability for granted. Budget 2001 locked in economic stability for the future, with the fiscal stance at least as tight as set out in Budget 2000 and the pre-Budget report.

The Government welcome representations made by the business community. This on-going and productive dialogue is essential to allow the Government to maintain their record of improvement of the business environment.

Following the Budget, the Government have received many representations that express continuing support for the Government's prudent approach to fiscal policy.

Working Families Tax Credit

22. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families are in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit; and how many families were in receipt of family credit in May 1997. [159900]

Dawn Primarolo: At November 2000, 1,168,000 families were in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit. At May 1997, 775,000 families were in receipt of Family Credit.

Pensioners (Taxation)

23. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the tax paid by pensioners. [159902]

Dawn Primarolo: As a result of the Government's policies on tax, seven out of 10 pensioners pay either no tax, or pay tax only at the 10p rate. Following our personal tax and benefit changes, pensioner households will be £600 a year better off on average compared to 1997.

European Monetary Union

24. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account he will take of public opinion in making a recommendation to replace the pound with the European single currency. [159903]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous. The Government believe that, if a decision to recommend joining is taken by the Government, it should be put to a vote in Parliament, and then to a referendum of the British people.

25. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent change there has been to his policy on British participation in the European single currency. [159905]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government's policy on membership of the single currency remains as set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in October 1997, and restated by the Prime Minister in February 1999. The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on membership of the single currency is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from farming organisations about the appropriate exchange rate for joining the single European currency. [159891]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor meets representatives from the farming industry to discuss a wide range of issues.

Public Service Agreements

27. **Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implementation of public service agreements. [159907]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Public service agreements detail the Government's commitments for the next three years, in return for the resources put in. Performance against these targets has been set out in the recently published annual departmental reports.

Child Poverty

28. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of his Department's policies on child poverty. [159908]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax and benefit reforms announced in this Parliament will lift over 1.2 million children out of relative poverty.

As a result of the measures, families with children in the poorest fifth of the population will on average be £1,700 a year better off, a real increase of around 15 per cent. in their incomes.

Public Investment

29. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's approach to investment in public services. [159909]

Mr. Andrew Smith: When this Government came to power, public sector net investment was equal to 0.5 per cent. of national income. The plans set out in the 2000 Spending Review will increase net investment to 1.7 per cent. of GDP by 2003–04. This Government are turning around 20 years of under-investment to modernise our public services.

Telecommunications

30. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the amount of tax paid by the telecommunications industry and the mobile phone manufacturers in each of the last three years. [159910]

Dawn Primarolo: The UK corporation tax liability of companies in the telecommunications industry and among mobile phone manufacturers, taken together, is as follows in respect of the latest three financial years for which estimates are available:

	£ billion
1996–97	1.2
1997–98	1.0
1998–99	1.3

Annuities

31. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from interested organisations on annuities. [159911]

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on his policy on annuities. [159893]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested is set out in Section 5.67 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report published on Budget Day, copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 21 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 236W, regarding annuity reform, what his estimate is of the costs to the Exchequer involved in introducing the recommendations of the McDonald report, with particular reference to the *(a)* minimum income requirement and *(b)* continued investment and management of the remaining pension funds available. [155963]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 28 March 2001]:* The information requested is set out in Section 5.67 of the "Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report" published on Budget Day, copies of which are in the Library.

New Build and Renovation

32. **Mr. Brake:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on VAT on new build and renovation. [159912]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor's Budget announcement included a cut to 5 per cent. in the rate of VAT on the cost of converting residential properties into a different number of dwellings and on the renovation of homes that have been empty for three years or more. The zero rate of VAT is also to be adjusted to provide relief for the sale of renovated houses which have been empty for 10 years or more.

Minimum Wage (Glasgow)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish estimates of the number of jobs paid at less than the national minimum wage rate for *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 2000, for (i) Glasgow, Pollok constituency and (ii) the City of Glasgow; and if he will make a statement. [160827]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Ian Davidson, dated 10 May 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of jobs paid at less than national minimum wage (NMW) rates in Glasgow, Pollok constituency and City of Glasgow for 1998–99 and 2000. (160827)

The Office for National Statistics has published estimates of the number of jobs paid at less than NMW rates for 1998, 1999 and 2000. These estimates are based on an improved methodology using data from the New Earnings Survey (NES) and Labour Force Survey (LFS). This methodology provides the best estimates for the number of jobs in the UK paid below low hourly rate thresholds and was developed to overcome the deficiencies inherent in using the NES and LFS separately for measuring low pay.

Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions are posted on the National Statistics website at: www.statistics.gov.uk/nbase/themes/labour_market/nmw_lowpay_tables.asp

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies and Unitary Authorities of numbers of jobs paid below NMW rates are not available on the basis of the methodology applied for producing the national and regional level figures.

Suicide (Aspirin and Paracetamol)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people *(a)* committed suicide and *(b)* attempted to commit suicide by taking an overdose of (i) aspirin and (ii) paracetamol in each year since 1995. [161000]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Fiona Mactaggart, dated 10 May 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about how many people (a) committed suicide and (b) attempted to commit suicide by taking an overdose of (i) aspirin and (ii) paracetamol in each year since 1995. I am replying in his absence. (161000)

Figures for the number of suicides from aspirin and paracetamol since 1995 are presented in the attached table.

Figures are not available for attempted suicides by taking an overdose of aspirin or paracetamol.

Number of suicide[1] deaths from paracetamol and aspirin, England and Wales, 1995 to 1999

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
(i) Aspirin					
Without mention of other drugs	28	24	32	24	13
With mention of other drugs[2]	19	19	13	11	8
(ii) Paracetamol					
Without mention of other drugs	155	125	162	141	104
With mention of other drugs[3]	98	86	97	101	110

[1] Includes suicide and poisoning of undetermined intent classified according to the International Classification of Disease, ninth edition, and are selected using ICD codes E950.0-E950.5 and E980.0-E980.5.

[2] Includes compounds containing aspirin

[3] Includes compounds containing paracetamol

Children's Grants

Mr. Plaskitt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families he expects to benefit from the new children's bond in the first year of its introduction. [159877]

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of the proposed grant to children at birth. [159882]

Dawn Primarolo: In late April the Government announced a consultation on two new proposals to encourage saving and the build up of assets, the Saving Gateway and the Child Trust Fund. The Child Trust Fund would benefit each of the 700,000 or more children born every year. The scheme would allow parents, grandparents, friends and children themselves to make additional contributions, so providing families with a safe and secure account to save towards their children's future. The Child Trust Fund would provide all young people beginning their adult life with the advantage that owning financial assets brings.

The cost of the scheme would depend on the level of the endowment and other aspects of its design, details on which the Government are consulting. But cost-effectiveness will be a key consideration as the Government develop this proposal in the light of consultation.

Community Sports Clubs

Mr. Andy King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans to introduce VAT relief for community sports clubs. [159887]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Brian White) at column 257.

Illegally Imported Meat

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tonnage of illegally-imported meat was intercepted by HM Customs and Excise in the last year for which figures are available. [160905]

Dawn Primarolo: In the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, Customs seized 2.655 metric tonnes of meat. This figure does not include meat detected when Customs are working with the lead enforcement authorities for meat imports, MAFF or local authority officials, where the meat is seized by the lead authorities. Customs have no central record of those seizures.

Euro

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 190W, on the legal status of the euro after 1 January 2002, if the euro will have the same legal status in the United Kingdom as other foreign currencies that it will replace. [160846]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the changeover cost for *(a)* business and *(b)* the civil service, if the United Kingdom accedes to the euro. [160902]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government have not made any estimate of the cost of a changeover either to business or the public sector.

The cost of a changeover would depend on the overall approach taken and individual management decisions.

Child Tax Credit (Glasgow)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Glasgow and *(d)* Glasgow, Pollok have claimed child tax credit up to the latest date for which figures are available. [160824]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue have invited PAYE taxpayers to claim the Children's Tax Credit (CTC). To date they have received over 3.5 million claim forms, which represents more than 85 per cent. of the potential 4 million families who are eligible for CTC and pay tax under PAYE in the UK. Self employed taxpayers will claim when they submit their 2001–02 tax returns. I regret that the other information that my hon. Friend has asked for is not available.

Life Expectancy

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated average life expectancy is of *(a)* men and *(b)* women, in (i) Glasgow, Pollok, (ii) the City of Glasgow, (iii) Scotland and (iv) the UK on (1) 1 May and (2) 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [160828]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Estimates of life expectancy are not available for specific days. The table gives life expectancy at birth for the period 1995–97 and for the calendar year 1997 and the calendar year 1999, the latest year for which the data required to calculate a life table are available. Sub-national life expectancy is not calculated at the level of parliamentary constituencies.

Expectation of life at birth in year shown

Area	*Based on data in year(s)*	*Males*	*Females*
(i)			
Glasgow, Pollok	—	[1]—	[1]—
(ii)			
City of Glasgow	[2]1995–97	68.4	75.4
(iii)			
Scotland	[2]1995–97	72.3	77.8
Scotland	[3]1997	72.6	78.0
Scotland	[3]1999	72.7	78.4
(iv)			
United Kingdom	[2]1995–97	74.4	79.6
United Kingdom	[3]1997	74.7	79.7
United Kingdom	[3]1999	75.0	79.9

[1] Not available

[2] Source: Griffiths C. and Fitzpatrick J. Geographic inequalities in Life Expectancy in the United Kingdom. 'Health Statistics Quarterly' no. 9. The Stationery Office 2001.

[3] Source: The Government Actuary's Department

ECOFIN

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 7 May; what the Government's voting record was at the Council; and if he will make a statement. [160972]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the meeting of the Economic and Finance Council of Ministers with the Paymaster General.

The Commission presented its recommendation for the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPGs) for 2001. This consists of a section of guidelines addressed to the Community as a whole, and a series of guidelines addressed to individual member states. I made it clear that the Commission had exceeded its remit in proposing a UK-specific guideline that the expected ratio of UK public sector current expenditure to GDP should not exceed 37.3 per cent. Decisions on the level of public spending are for member states, and the Government's fiscal rules ensure sound and sustainable public finances while enabling increased investment in priority public services. The guidelines will now be discussed by officials from the member states and the Commission before ECOFIN presents them to the European Council in Gothenburg and their final adoption by ECOFIN.

A joint Council-Commission delegation will travel to Russia next week to discuss economic co-operation. The presidency reported on its plans to discuss how the EU could best contribute to improving the financial and investment climate in Russia. No decisions would be taken, and the presidency will report back to ECOFIN on the dialogue.

The presidency gave an update on the exchanges of correspondence between the Commission and the European Parliament on the modalities of the Lamfalussy proposals for improving the regulation of the securities market.

The Economic Policy Committee chairman set out the committee's work programme for the coming year. This includes UK-inspired work on how economic incentives contribute to promoting R&D. The Committee will report back on this to ECOFIN in the autumn.

Ministers agreed that further work was required on prudential regulation of supplementary pensions. Conclusions were also adopted on e-commerce and financial services.

The Commission gave advance notice of the preliminary draft Community budget for 2002, which was subsequently adopted by the Commission on 8 May.

The Commission presented its communication on the elimination of tax obstacles to the cross-border provision of occupational pensions, which advocates exchange of information and sharing best practice as solutions to double or non-taxation of cross-border pensions. Ministers agreed that the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the member states and a technical working group should undertake a more detailed study of the communication.

No votes were taken during the course of the meeting.

Chester Street Insurance Holdings

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on compensation for asbestosis sufferers and their families following the insolvency of the insurance company Chester Street. [161061]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Following the insolvency of Chester Street on 9 January this year, concerns were raised over the position of employees whose private sector employer insured with Chester Street and no longer exists or is insolvent, and whose injury was sustained during employment in the private sector before 1972 (1975 in Northern Ireland). There were fears that these individuals would not receive the compensation for which their employers would have been liable.

However, the insurance industry will fund compensation to those individuals in the following circumstances.

> The Policyholder's Protection Board (PPB) will make payment in accordance with their statutory powers (90 per cent. of awards in respect of pre-1972 (1975 in NI) liabilities) if the compensation award was settled prior to Chester Street's insolvency on 9 January 2001.
>
> If the award was settled on or after 9 January, the insurance industry will fund equivalent payments pending the implementation of the new industry funded Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS), planned to come into effect no later than November this year. The Financial Services Authority (FSA) have been asked to explore rules to cover employee third party rights in employer liability cases to ensure that in cases where both the employer and the insurer are insolvent, victims receive compensation.

The Government will themselves fund the compensation owed to former employees of public sector companies for whom they are liable.

These arrangements apply only when the employer no longer exists or is insolvent. Where the employer still exists, or its liabilities have been carried forward to another company, that company or firm are liable to pay the compensation award.

The PPB will ensure that claims are topped up to 100 per cent. so far as they relate to compulsory insurance policies (i.e. relate to the period from 1972 (1975 in Northern Ireland)). Both private sector employers and, where that employer no longer exists, the employees, are eligible for that payment.

Waste Management

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to set the waste industry targets to allocate a greater proportion of tax credits under the landfill tax credit scheme towards sustainable waste management projects, particularly those which promote recycling. [161062]

Mr. Timms: The Government have set an indicative target of 65 per cent. of landfill tax credits to be allocated to sustainable waste management projects (category C-CC). The Government also propose that the industry works towards at least maintaining the current proportion of a third of tax credits within this category allocated specifically to recycling projects.

The Government will review progress towards these targets in future Budget reports.

Long-term Unemployment

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on his measures to tackle long-term unemployment. [159880]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross).

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations are in place concerning the import of *(a)* meat and *(b)* livestock from countries where foot and mouth disease is prevalent. [156369]

Ms Quin: EU rules permit the importation of meat from a limited number of third countries where foot and mouth disease is present and where the veterinary authorities have contained the disease in specified regions. The meat must come from those regions of the relevant countries that are not considered to pose a risk to human or animal health. Fully matured boneless beef, which does not pose foot and mouth disease risk, may be imported from other regions subject to veterinary certification. Countries to which these controls currently apply are Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay. GB domestic rules currently prohibit the import of meat from Argentina, Uruguay, South Africa and Swaziland where foot and mouth disease outbreaks have been recently confirmed. The GB Regulations governing the imports of these products are the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996 (as amended) and the Fresh Meat (Import Conditions) Regulations 1996.

GB imports livestock under EU or national rules only from countries or areas officially recognised as being free from foot and mouth disease. GB imports of livestock are regulated by the Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) (England and Wales) Regulations 2000 (as amended) and the Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) (Scotland) Regulations 2000 (as amended).

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries in which foot and mouth disease is considered to be endemic, indicating in each case if importation of their meat into the United Kingdom is prohibited. [154429]

Ms Quin: The importation of meat is permitted from a limited number of third countries where foot and mouth disease is present and where the veterinary authorities have contained the disease in specified regions. EC rules permit imports from those regions of the relevant countries that are not considered to pose a risk to human or animal health. Fully matured boneless beef, which does not pose any foot and mouth disease risk, may be imported from other regions subject to veterinary certification. Countries to which these controls currently apply are Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay. UK domestic rules currently prohibit the import of meat from Argentina, Uruguay, South Africa and Swaziland where foot and mouth disease outbreaks have been recently confirmed. The UK Regulations governing the imports of these products are the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996 (as amended) and the Fresh Meat (Import Conditions) Regulations 1996.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when restrictions on imported beef from *(a)* Argentina and *(b)* other countries where foot and mouth disease is endemic were first imposed. [155232]

Ms Quin: EC rules permit the importation of meat from a limited number of third countries where foot and mouth disease is present and where the veterinary authorities have contained the disease in specified regions. The meat must come from those regions of the relevant countries that are not considered to pose a risk to human or animal health. Fully matured boneless beef, which does not pose a foot and mouth disease risk may be imported from other regions subject to veterinary certification. Countries to which these controls currently apply are Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Brazil, Columbia and Uruguay. Domestic legislation in England and Wales currently prohibits the import of meat from South Africa and Swaziland (since 5 January 2001), Argentina (since 14 March) and Uruguay (since 26 April). Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar action for each of these countries shortly after each of the dates specified.

Mr. Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list his main policy decisions in response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, indicating in each case whether he had to seek EU approval. [157266]

Ms Quin: The following table lists the key policy decisions, showing where EU approval had to be sought. Where it was not necessary to obtain EU approval, we have kept the Commission and other member states informed.

Decision	*EU approval required*
Suspension of issue of export certificates	[1]No
Immediate standstill on all FMD susceptible animal movements throughout GB	No
Prompt slaughtering of all infected premises and dangerous contacts	No
Sheep and pigs 3 km cull in Cumbria	No
Army deployed	No
Contiguous premises to be treated as dangerous contacts	No
24/48 hour targets set	No
Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme launched	[2]Yes
Contingency plan for emergency vaccination in Cumbria and Devon drawn up	Yes
Lifting of restrictions in some areas	No
Animals in surveillance zones sent for slaughter for food chain, at approved abattoirs in same zone	No
Refinement of contiguous cull policy	No

[1] But resumption of exports will require EU approval

[2] For State Aid purposes

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when movement restrictions imposed on the area surrounding Stiles abattoir in Bromham will be lifted. [156902]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The Declaratory Order relating to the infected area which includes Bromham was revoked on 22 April 2001.

The Stiles abattoir in Bromham is able to take animals for slaughter. From 23 April, animals inside an infected area but not within 3 km of an infected premises have been allowed to move for slaughter to an abattoir within the same infected area. This movement is subject to veterinary inspection for clinical signs of disease. The Minister announced on 3 May that healthy animals within the 3 km protection zone could also be licensed for slaughter within the infected area, subject to an examination for clinical signs of foot and mouth disease by a MAFF local veterinary inspector.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what warnings were given to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department of the risk of spreading foot and mouth prior to the present outbreak through out-of-ring sales at markets. [156882]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 4 April 2001]:* We are not aware of any warnings which highlighted the risk of spread of foot and mouth disease from out-of-ring sales. Since such sales are not recorded on the market records there will inevitably be delays and difficulties in tracing movements of these sheep from a market. Any delay in tracing livestock that may have been exposed to infection may increase the risk of disease spread.

The Government are now consulting on proposals to introduce a requirement limiting movements of sheep, goats and cattle by restricting their movement off an agricultural holding within a period of 20 days following the movement of animals onto the holding. For sheep and goats it is also proposed to introduce a requirement for notification of movements. There is already a system of notifying cattle movements.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what warnings were given to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department of the risk of spreading foot and mouth prior to the present outbreak on account of the absence of a standstill period after movement for sheep, goats and cattle. [156880]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 4 April 2001]:* Ministers and officials are not aware of any warnings about the risk of spreading foot and mouth specifically as a result of the absence of a standstill period.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish daily statistics showing the number of animals awaiting slaughter, broken down to show the number of *(a)* healthy animals, *(b)* animals suffering from foot and mouth disease and *(c)* the carcases awaiting disposal. [156835]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 3 April 2001]:* Daily statistics are published on MAFF's internet site www.maff.gov.uk showing the number of animals awaiting slaughter, number of animals slaughtered and the number of carcases that are awaiting disposal. We also publish daily average slaughter and disposal figures.

It is not possible to break down the number of slaughtered animals into those that are healthy, and those that were diagnosed as infected with foot and mouth disease. This is due to the automatic cull of all animals on infected premises and those animals considered at risk as dangerous contacts. Not all animals which are slaughtered are tested for foot and mouth disease.

MAFF also publishes daily statistics showing the number of healthy animals slaughtered under the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when it was decided to make a landfill site at Fosterville, Newton Abbot, available for the burial of carcases of animals slaughtered in connection with the control of foot and mouth disease; what category of carcases *(a)* have been buried at the site to date and *(b)* may be buried there in the future; how many carcases and what species of animal can be buried at Fosterville; how many carcases are to be buried at the site; if it is his policy to allow carcases from infected areas to be buried in uninfected areas; if he will list the burial sites that have been approved where carcases from infected areas are buried in uninfected areas; what (i) advice and (ii) representations he has received about the burial of carcases from infected areas in uninfected areas; and if he will make a statement. [157320]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The landfill site at Fosterville, Newton Abbot was made available from 30 March 2001 to accept uninfected carcases from the livestock welfare disposal scheme. Carcases from animals taken for disease control purposes rather than under the welfare scheme are not being sent to Fosterville.

As of 23 April 2001 the site had accepted 34,540 carcases from the scheme. The site can accept approximately 200 tonnes of carcases per day. It is anticipated that use of Fosterville is likely to continue until the scheme is no longer necessary.

MAFF does not approve individual movements of livestock carcases under the livestock welfare disposal scheme. The Intervention Board is responsible for administering this scheme and directs carcases to disposal sites in order to maximise the use of available resources such as abattoirs and disposal sites at any one time, taking account of policy guidelines.

As far as possible, the objective of the authorities responsible for the disposal arrangements is to ensure that carcases are not transported from a higher risk area to a lower risk area. However factors such as the location of abattoirs and landfill sites mean this is not possible in all circumstances. We recognise that this is a matter of general concern, and has been raised a number of times. Veterinary advice is that the risk of spreading the disease through transporting welfare carcases from infected areas to non-infected areas is low when proper protocols are followed on veterinary inspection before slaughter, transportation and disposal.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average amount paid to date to farms in compensation for the culling of animals in the foot and mouth outbreak; and what estimate he has made of the final average payment. [157787]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Approximately £101 million has been paid so far (as of 3 May) to farmers in compensation for the animals slaughtered as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. The average payments for each species (as of 26 April) are as follows:

	£
Cattle	900.20
Sheep	108.21
Pigs	88.35

As of 5 May the estimated approximate total to be paid as compensation is £629 million.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 78W, for what reason motor vehicles arriving from France are not subject to the same disinfectant procedure as motor vehicles leaving Britain. [157085]

Ms Quin: The EU Standing Veterinary Committee considered that the risk of disease spread being transmitted by motor vehicles departing the UK for France, as compared to the risk posed by those departing France for the UK, was considered significantly greater because of the large number of outbreaks of foot and mouth in the UK compared with France. Foot and mouth disease related restrictions in France have now been lifted.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the disposal of carcases at Throckmorton airfield will affect the status of the surrounding area for foot and mouth control purposes; and if he will make a statement. [157867]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The disposal of slaughtered carcases at Throckmorton airfield does not affect the surrounding area for foot and mouth disease control purposes. Part of the site is located within the protection zone of the infected premises at Bishampton and the whole site is included within the infected area.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the incidence of the airborne spread of foot and mouth disease. [158450]

Ms Quin: Airborne spread of the virus can take place, especially from pigs, but the evidence so far suggests that this has not been a major factor in the spread of the current outbreak.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the average cost per head is of (1) on-farm cremation of livestock; [158205]

(2) on-farm burial of livestock. [158206]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* This information is currently not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his assessment is of the reasons for which the confirmed cases of foot and mouth are disproportionately concentrated in Dumfries and Galloway, Cumbria and Devon; and if he will make a statement. [158253]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The high concentration of cases in these areas is almost certainly attributable to the movements of sheep in the period before the infection at the farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall was confirmed on 23 February and livestock movements in Great Britain were banned on the same day. These areas are among the most highly stocked in the country and all received sheep from Longtown market during that period.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if the pig swill used at Burnside Farm, Heddon-on-the-Wall, was treated and used by a neighbouring farmer; [158244]

(2) what the basis was of his Department's statement that two named dealers were the main source of spread of foot and mouth disease; [158251]

(3) on what dates visits were made by MAFF officials to Burnside Farm, Heddon-on-the Wall; for what reason such visits took place; on what date officials first formed suspicions about the possible presence of foot and mouth disease in pigs at Burnside Farm; how much time elapsed between the suspicion of disease and its confirmation by test; and if he will make a statement. [158245]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 23 April 2001]:* These matters are under inquiry. It would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his assessment is of the impact on the spread of foot and mouth of the time which passed between the implementation of the export ban and the UK movement ban. [158250]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The export ban was introduced on 21 February. Before that, movement restrictions had been placed around all of the known cases of the disease, starting with the first suspected case in an Essex abattoir on 19 February.

The tracing of farms supplying the Essex abattoir began immediately the case was notified. Once the infection at the farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall had been confirmed on 23 February, the nationwide standstill on livestock movements was introduced the same day.

It is now known that the disease spread mainly through the movement of sheep and subsequent mixing of animals, and that the vast majority of the spread of disease around the country had already taken place before the first outbreak was discovered in Essex.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to establish the role of personal contact between farmers and (i) other farmers, (ii) veterinary staff and (iii) personnel involved in slaughter in the spread of foot and mouth disease. [158565]

Ms Quin: Epidemiological investigations into the outbreak are considering all possible routes of spread. Farmers have been issued with a wide range of advice and guidance on managing contacts with other people. With regard to (i) farmers should limit contact with other keepers of livestock. However, if there is contact then they are advised to disinfect footwear, change clothes and wash with hot water and soap, including hair, before going near their own animals. Any item or object that may have had contact with disease should also be disinfected. On (ii) and (iii) veterinary staff and slaughtermen operate under strict instructions to ensure that all appropriate cleansing and disinfection procedures are followed before and after attending a farm.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what cost to benefit analysis he has conducted of the implications of *(a)* a regime of regular inspections and testing and *(b)* immediate culling of dairy herds of farms contiguous to outbreaks of foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [158507]

Ms Quin: The scientific and veterinary advice we received was that the prompt culling of all potentially infected animals—including those on contiguous farms—was essential to the overall success of our disease control policy.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will halt the slaughter of healthy organic stock and rare breeds which are outside the three-mile zone of an area identified with foot and mouth; and if he will make a statement. [158283]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The only animals more than 3 km from infected premises which are being slaughtered under current foot and mouth disease control measures are animals which are dangerous contacts—that is, susceptible animals known to have been in contact with animals that have had the disease, or with personnel, vehicles and equipment which has been in contact with such animals. Exempting such dangerous contacts because they are organic stock or are from rare breeds would involve an unacceptable risk of disease transmission.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy only to proceed with the cull of dairy cattle at Old House Farm and Eatons Farm, Tibberton, Worcestershire, after the case for such a cull has been reviewed by a Minister; and if he will make a statement. [158989]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* We currently have no plans to cull dairy cattle at either of these premises.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent advice he has received on the properties of napalm relating to *(a)* vaporising and *(b)* producing fumes and by-products. [158869]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Ministry has received advice from the Defence Evaluation Research Agency (DERA) concerning the use of napalm. There are two forms of napalm available, which both produce very toxic compounds when they burn. We therefore have not used napalm because of the public and environmental health risks.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what epidemiological studies he has conducted in *(a)* Cumbria and *(b)* elsewhere which study the location of animal cremation pyres, wind direction and later outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [159455]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The Institute of Animal Health at Pirbright has recently produced a report, in collaboration with MAFF and the Meteorological Office, on the spread of the foot and mouth disease virus from the burning of animal carcases on open pyres. This reports is to be published in the "Veterinary Record" shortly.

Six pyres, located in Devon, Exeter and Worcestershire, were monitored. Additional pyres are currently being investigated in Cumbria and Devon. The report concludes that early results indicate that breakdowns due to virus dispersion from pyres are unlikely to occur in general and the pyres analysed to date have shown no evidence that breakdowns due to this cause have occurred.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the average valuation per cow has been for dairy Holstein cattle in each week of the foot and mouth epidemic. [159462]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The precise information requested is not readily available. The weekly average of cattle valuations received is as follows:

Week ended	*£*
11 March	712
18 March	662
25 March	864
1 April	810
8 April	1,007
15 April	1,006
22 April	878
29 April	1,229

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of animals from farms caught in the 3 km voluntary cull have tested positive for foot and mouth at Great Orton. [159458]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The information requested is not currently held on a computerised system and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughtered on suspicion cases there have been; and how many of these were included in the totals of infected premises. [159459]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* As of 2 May there have been a total of 210 slaughtered on suspicion cases. Of these, 50 have been reclassified as infected premises, following clinical examination or testing, and included in the total of infected premises.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each week of the foot and mouth epidemic the number of suspect cases reported to his Department by farmers and the numbers of those which had swabs sent to Pirbright before foot and mouth disease was confirmed. [159450]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Week commencing	*Number of suspect cases reported*[1]	*Number of samples taken from suspect cases*
19 February 2001	36	18
26 February 2001	365	124
5 March 2001	426	167
12 March 2001	581	219
19 March 2001	674	290
26 March 2001	722	259
2 April 2001	596	223
9 April 2001	537	199
16 April 2001	446	138
23 April 2001	340	77
30 April 2001	151	35

[1] The figures include all suspect cases reported, not just those reported by farmers.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the ranks and job titles of the officials in Page street from whom temporary veterinary inspectors had to obtain authorisation that their diagnosis of foot and mouth was a confirmed case. [159451]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* On investigation for foot and mouth disease, a veterinary inspector in the field contacts a Veterinary Adviser at the Emergency Control Centre in Page street, London to discuss the individual case. The Veterinary Adviser will discuss the case with the Veterinary Manager of the Centre or a VA supervisor appointed by him. Centre managers are veterinary members of the senior civil service or unified grade 6. Veterinary Supervisors appointed by them are at veterinary grade 7 or equivalent. All these grades are staffed by experienced and qualified veterinary surgeons. The case is then either confirmed or negated on clinical grounds or the option of "slaughter on suspicion of disease" is followed.

At the peak of the outbreak in late March/early April, in order to reduce delays in confirmation, those veterinary advisers who were experienced were given the authority to confirm or negate cases if need be without referral to the manager, though working under supervision. In practice about two thirds of the cases were still discussed before a decision was taken. As soon as the situation eased somewhat centre managers reverted to the standard process of confirmation of cases after discussion with a veterinary manager.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms in *(a)* England, *(b)* Cumbria and *(c)* Devon that were originally designated as contiguous were not slaughtered out because of appeals or interventions by (i) the farmers concerned and (ii) third parties. [159461]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* This information is not available in the format requested and cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost. However, in Cumbria currently there are 14 and in Devon 21 appeals outstanding. These appeals were made by the livestock owners or solicitors acting on their behalf.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms in Cumbria have had sheep slaughtered in the voluntary cull; and how many sheep were affected. [159456]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* As at 2 May, 523,857 sheep had been slaughtered on around 1,800 holdings in Cumbria as part of the north Cumbria/Solway precautionary cull.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many (i) cattle and (ii) sheep on how many farms in *(a)* England and *(b)* Cumbria have been slaughtered because they were contiguous to infected premises but where the infected premises later tested negative. [159475]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The information is as set out.

	England	*Cumbria*
(a) Infected premises for which laboratory tests detected no FMD virus	224	58
(b) Number of premises contiguous to (a)[1]	130	9
(c) Number of cattle slaughtered on (b)	13,827	1,616
(d) Number of sheep slaughtered on (b)	89,516	7,322

[1] Some premises may also be contiguous to other infected premises

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what powers his Department has to restrict the holding of car boot sales in agricultural areas during the foot and mouth outbreak. [159544]

Ms Quin: Article 29(3) of the Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983 allows a veterinary inspector to prohibit by notice in writing the holding of any sporting or recreational activity on any land in an infected area specified in the notice when in his opinion the holding of such activity on that land may cause the spread of disease.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he has given to disposing of *(a)* infected and *(b)* non-infected animals slaughtered during the foot and mouth crisis at sea; what advice he has received on this option; and if he will make a statement. [159424]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The UK is a Contracting Party to the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic, which does not permit the disposal of animal carcases at sea. We are also advised that there would be substantial practical and environmental problems associated with the disposal of large numbers of carcases in this way.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he first notified other EU Governments of a suspected case of foot and mouth in England during the current outbreak; [159522]

(2) when the French Government first slaughtered sheep as a result of the current outbreak of foot and mouth in the UK; [159523]

(3) what discussions he has had with the French Government in their investigation of the importation of foot and mouth disease-susceptible species into France, with special reference to their choice of starting date as 15 January; and if he will make a statement; [159524]

(4) how many and on what dates consignments of animal carcases were returned to the UK by the French Government after slaughter for foot and mouth disease control reasons since 15 January. [159525]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* We notified the European Commission, and through it other EU member states, on 20 February, the day the first case was confirmed. We understand that the French authorities started slaughtering susceptible animals of UK origin and contact animals, shortly afterwards. We have kept in close touch with the French authorities about export consignments of susceptible animals from Britain. Any decision to trace these exports back to 15 January has been taken by the French authorities. No animals slaughtered for foot and mouth disease control reasons have been returned as carcases to the UK.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what measures he is taking to control pollutant emissions from tyres used as accelerants in the open-air burning of slaughtered livestock; [159855]

(2) on how many disposal sites for the combustion of slaughtered livestock tyres have been used as fuel; and if he will make a statement; [159856]

(3) if he will forbid the use of tyres as fuel in the burning of slaughtered livestock carcases. [159857]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 2 May 2001]:* Those responsible for building pyres are already instructed to avoid using tyres as fuel, where possible, and their use is discouraged by the Environment Agency (EA). This practice may have continued in some cases as tyres are effective in establishing the fire, and it is important to have a well established fire at an early stage. The Prime Minister announced on 3 May that no pyres to dispose of large numbers of carcases will be lit, and so it is unlikely that the use of tyres in pyres will continue.

It is not possible to say how many disposal sites have used tyres for combustion purposes, as disposal arrangements are made at local level.

The Defence Establishment Research Agency is currently carrying out research into how pyres can be made more efficient. The EA and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) have been monitoring pollution from pyres; two sites in Devon are being monitored automatically and findings from this project are published on the DETR website www.detr.gov.uk and are updated daily. Dioxins are being measured in three areas in Devon. Dioxin measurements from a site in South Wales have been published www.powys.gov.uk, and have also been measured in Cumbria. The studies so far have found that pollution levels from pyres are generally low. DETR is also working with the Department of Health (DoH) looking at the possible environmental impact of pyres and guidance for siting pyres has been produced; this is available on the DoH website www.doh.gov.uk/fmdguidance.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department expects to pay the outstanding invoices to Greyhound Plant Services, Oswestry in connection with foot and mouth plant services; and if he will make a statement. [160165]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Outstanding invoices are currently being processed and should be paid under the Ministry's normal terms of payment, that is within 30 days of receipt of an undisputed invoice.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's responsibilities in relation to the drawing up of maps denoting the infected area status of constituencies in Wales. [160677]

Ms Quin: When a case of Foot and Mouth Disease is confirmed, an Infected Area with boundaries which are at least 10 km from the infected place has to be designated by a Declaratory Order unless the area is already within an existing Infected Area. The boundaries are set by describing features and map references from the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 series. Declaratory Orders for England and Wales are made by my Department and a map depicting the infected area may be inspected in the MAFF office at 1A Page Street, London between 9.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m., Monday to Friday. The maps are also reproduced on the MAFF website http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures have been taken to increase the scrutiny of imports at *(a)* ports and *(b)* airports as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. [160503]

Ms Quin: As my right hon. Friend the Minister said in his statements on 27 March and 3 May, MAFF is co-ordinating action across Government to ensure that rules on both commercial and personal imports at ports and airports are enforced effectively. In addition he has also asked the European Commission to give urgent attention to ensuring that the law on personal imports is clear and robust to help enable effective controls across all the Community's borders.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the reliability of the different kinds of test for foot and mouth disease carried out at his Department's laboratories at Pirbright. [160742]

Ms Quin: The Foot and Mouth Laboratory at Pirbright is the FAO/OIE nominated World Reference Laboratory for foot and mouth disease. They employ a number of diagnostic methods. We are confident that they provide the best possible scientific advice on the disease.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many farms at which his Department carried out contiguous culls of livestock were subject to laboratory tests for foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement; [161012]

(2) how many farms that were subject to laboratory tests for foot and mouth disease as the result of the contiguous cull programme produced *(a)* positive evidence of the foot and mouth virus, *(b)* proof of the absence of the foot and mouth virus and *(c)* indeterminate results; and if he will make a statement. [161013]

Ms Quin: This information is not currently held in the format required.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence his Department has collated relating to the use of borax in the treatment of foot and mouth disease. [160715]

Ms Quin: We have not received any evidence relating to the effectiveness of Borax as a treatment for foot and mouth disease, nor have we received any scientific evidence to demonstrate its efficacy, safety or quality. In the absence of such evidence which would be required before Borax could be authorised as a veterinary medicinal product, claims that it is effective in preventing foot and mouth disease would be incompatible with the requirements of the Marketing Authorisations for Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994 as amended. Manufacturers of such products as Borax may apply for such authorisation.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken by his Department to ensure fair and comparable standards in the valuation of livestock to be culled as a result of *(a)* foot and mouth disease contact and *(b)* inclusion in the livestock welfare disposal scheme. [160753]

Ms Quin: The two are not directly comparable. When livestock are slaughtered for disease control purposes, compensation is paid at market value. Under the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme, a payment is made to ensure welfare problems are resolved. It is not a compensation scheme and the payment rate does not reflect the full commercial value of the livestock involved.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the consequences of the formation of dioxins at high temperatures in the presence of carbon, hydrogen and chlorine, as a result of the use of pyres, built with creosote-soaked railway sleepers and tyres. [158867]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

Guidance has been issued by the Department of Health entitled "FMD: Measures to minimise risk to public health from slaughter and disposal of animals—further guidance" to provide practical advice to those at the local level on the best way, from a public health perspective, to dispose of animal carcases (available on www.doh.gov.uk/fmdguidance). This includes guidance on the construction and siting of pyres which takes account of the possible risks to health from the emissions of air pollutants from the pyres At the beginning of the outbreak, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Environment Agency issued a joint statement which advised that pyres should be constructed as set out in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food "Air Code". The code contains detailed advice on the materials to be used for the construction of pyres. This also includes advice on the materials, which should not be used as fuels in such pyres (such as plastics, rubber, and tyres), so as to minimise the production of air pollutants such as dark smoke, dioxins and furans.

The national environmental technology centre have advised, with respect to the use of treated timbers in pyres, that "creosote treated wood is not expected to give rise to significantly higher emissions of dioxins or PAH (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) than untreated wood". This advice, and consequences for public health, is contained within the risk assessment published by the Department of Health "Foot and Mouth—Effects on Health of Emissions from Pyres Used for Disposal Animals" available on www.doh.gov.uk.

Swine Fever

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 566W, if he will make a statement on which holding was responsible for the source of the disease, including evidence on the cause and possible transmission of classical swine fever. [158451]

Ms Quin: At this stage there is nothing further to add to my answer of 13 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 566W.

Throckmorton Burial Site

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he is taking to minimise *(a)* odour, *(b)* light pollution and *(c)* noise from the Throckmorton airfield burial site; and if he will make a statement; [159271]

(2) what is the purpose of the floodlighting at the Throckmorton airfield burial site; for what reason the lighting operates through the night; and if he will make a statement. [159272]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* Air pollution control engineers, Air Spectrum Environmental, have been contracted to deal with all aspects of odour control. A spray system is in place which has recently been increased by 300 per cent.

Flood lighting was installed at the Throckmorton burial site, because it was originally envisaged that some work might have to be carried out after the hours of darkness in order to clear the backlog of carcases. In the event, the operation did not require a prolonged period of night working and the lights have now been switched off at night following representations from local residents.

The facilities at the Throckmorton site are now running on mains electricity, which has allowed the generators to be switched off.

Dioxin Emissions

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what analysis has been made of dioxins and other materials emitted by slow burning wood fires with particular reference to *(a)* foot and mouth cremation pyres and *(b)* forest fires. [158415]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Health has recently published a risk assessment "Foot and Mouth—Effects on Health of Emissions from Tyres Used for Disposal of Animals" (available on www.doh.gov.uk). The risk assessment provides estimates of the release of dioxins and other air pollutants from pyres and predicted concentrations in air.

My Department has undertaken air quality monitoring in the vicinity of some larger pyres, being used to dispose of animal carcases. Some local authorities have also instigated such monitoring. In addition, the Environment Agency have assisted Government by monitoring and modelling air pollution in the vicinity of pyres.

Air quality monitoring has been undertaken at Sennybridge in Wales, and Holsworthy, Chumleigh and Okehampton in Devon. A limited survey was also undertaken around one pyre in Allerdale, Cumbria. At all sites, measurements of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and particles have been made, and found to be generally low. At Sennybridge, Holsworthy, Okehampton and Allerdale monitoring for polyaromatic hydrocarbons, dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls has also been carried out. Dioxin concentrations in air have been reported by Powys county council, measured in the vicinity of the pyre at Sennybridge, and Allerdale district council in the vicinity of the Allerdale pyre. At these sites dioxin concentrations in air, measured at locations between 1 km and 2 km from the pyres, ranged between 2.57–8.16 fg/m^3 I-TEQ. These concentrations are low when compared with average urban levels, and are of a similar order to those currently found in rural areas of the UK.

I am not aware of any corresponding work in relation to forest fires in the UK. However the national atmospheric emissions inventory estimates that 2 per cent. (5.8g) of the UK's annual emissions in the UK in 1999 was derived from natural fires.

Parliamentary Questions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he will answer the questions tabled for answer on 2 April, Refs. 156280 and 156277; [159445]

(2) when he will answer the question tabled for answer on 23 April, Ref. 158489, concerning the issuing of Form D notices to farmers by telephone. [159444]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to her on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 122–23W, and 128W, and on 30 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 493W.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he will provide a substantive answer to the question tabled for answer on 6 April. (Ref. 157364); [160102]

(2) when he will provide a substantive answer to the question from the hon. Member for Ludlow tabled for answer on 6 April (Ref. 157364). [160505]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 2 and 9 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 124W.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will reply to the question tabled by the hon. Member for Vale of York on 27 March relating to exclusion zones (ref: 156280). [157366]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 122W.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what route sheep are being conveyed from Devon through Dorset and Hampshire for disposal in Sussex. [158101]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme all sheep slaughtered in Devon are landfilled in that county.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the benefits of relaxing controls in East Sussex on animal movements to allow movement of cattle from winter quarters to summer pasture; if he will allow such decisions to be a matter for Trading Standards officers at East Sussex County Council; and if he will make a statement. [159588]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* Local movement licences are available in East Sussex for welfare and management reasons. These licences are issued by MAFF Local Veterinary Inspectors who are usually members of local veterinary practices.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to tighten the rules concerning animal movements in the UK and the wider EU market. [160624]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The Government have no such plans at present. Our priority is the control of foot and mouth disease, as a result of which animal movements in the UK are tightly controlled under licence. Proposals to have a 20-day stop following animal movements are out for consultation. The EU is currently reviewing the directions on animal movement and the UK will play a full role in that.

Agricultural Exports

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the rate of agricultural export subsidies is; to which agricultural exports they apply; and if he will make a statement. [160450]

Ms Quin: Agricultural export subsidies, called export refunds, are paid across a range of agricultural commodities. The Common Agricultural Policy currently includes provision for export refunds for cereals, rice, sugar, olive oil, fruit and vegetables, beef, milk powders, butter, cheese, pigmeat, eggs, poultrymeat and various processed products manufactured from cereals, rice, sugar, dairy products and eggs.

Rates of refund vary between and within commodities depending on the actual product exported, the current market situation, including world prices and the euro/dollar exchange rate, and the destination. Currently there are in excess of 1,100 different rates many of which can, and do, change regularly in the light of trading conditions. For some products, the rate of export refund is currently zero. Detailed rates of refund are available, and can be obtained on request from the Intervention Board.

Forest Enterprise

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* turnover, *(b)* profit and *(c)* amount of revaluation was recorded by Forest Enterprise in the most recent year for which figures are available. [160406]

Mr. Morley: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its Chief Executive, Dr. Bob McIntosh, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Bob McIntosh to Mr. Christopher Gill, dated May 2001:

I have been asked to reply to your question to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about the turnover, profit and revaluation figures for Forest Enterprise.

In 1999–2000, Forest Enterprise made an operating deficit of £11.3m on a turnover of £95.5m. The Income and Expenditure account for Forest Enterprise shows a total deficit of £103.7m, including the net cost of Recreation, Conservation and Heritage, the deficit on sale of properties and the notional cost of capital.

The Forest Estate was valued downwards by £146.0m in 1999–2000 as part of a total adjustment to the Revaluation Reserve of £144.9m.

If you require any further information please let me know.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the quinquennial review of the Forest Enterprise executive agency. [161073]

Mr. Morley: The first stage of the review of Forest Enterprise has concluded that the agency has put in a strong performance on the sustainability of its forest management, has successfully involved communities and other stakeholders in its decision-making and has responded successfully to change—particularly devolution. The review has recommended that Forest Enterprise should retain its status as an executive agency of the Forestry Commission. Ministers in the UK Government, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales have accepted these conclusions and recommendations. They intend to review the options for further decentralising handling of forestry policy and management, in the light of continuing experience of the devolved structure. The report of the first stage of the review is available on the Forestry Commission's website and will be placed in the Library.

TB

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the destruction of a herd of fallow deer at Charlcote Park under tuberculosis regulations. [160672]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Though both the red and fallow deer herds at Charlcote Park have been under movement restrictions because of suspect TB since 1989 at no time has MAFF required the National Trust to cull out either herd. MAFF understand that in early April 2001 the National Trust culled the red deer herd. Any decision to cull the fallow deer herd at Charlcote will be a management decision of the National Trust.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what impact the foot and mouth outbreak has had on *(a)* regular tuberculosis testing of cattle, *(b)* the culling of badgers for the triplet studies of TB and *(c)* the validity of the triplet studies of TB. [160671]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Almost all routine testing for TB in cattle has been put on hold, with State Veterinary Service (SVS) resources diverted to deal with the foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreak. Some reactor cattle disclosed by testing carried out before the imposition of FMD movement restrictions are still being held on farms. Decisions on re-tests on inconclusive reactors and Short Interval Tests (SITs) are being made on a case-by-case basis according to the FMD situation in different Divisions of the SVS.

The badger culling field trial has been put on hold. The Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB has advised MAFF officials that this should not affect the scientific validity of the trial. The Group is developing advice to MAFF on a strategy for the resumption of trial operations after the conclusion of the foot and mouth disease outbreak.

Intervention Board

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) who the key official in the Intervention Board is who deals with Wales; and what his or her contact number is; [160698]

(2) what plans he has to review the operation of the Intervention Board. [160699]

Ms Quin: The Intervention Board administers a number of Common Agricultural Policy schemes in Wales and many of its officials are in contact with farmers and traders. The Chief Executive of the Intervention Board is Johnston McNeill, who can be contacted at the board's office in Reading, for which the telephone number is 0118 958 3626.

The future role of the Intervention Board was recently considered as part of the Department's review of its regional structure. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 24 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 472W. The work of the board in administering Common Agricultural Policy schemes is being brought together with similar work being done by the Regional Service Centres in the Department to form a new Paying Agency. Johnston McNeill was appointed Chief Executive of the new Agency with effect from 2 April.

BSE

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those hunt kennels which the state veterinary service found to be unsatisfactory under the BSE enforcement programme in the last six months. [160750]

Ms Quin: From November 2000 to April 2001, there were five unsatisfactory visits to hunt kennels. Details of unsatisfactory visits are reported in the BSE Enforcement Bulletin which is available on our website.

Meat Imports

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if beef over 30 months old from *(a)* Argentina, *(b)* Australia, *(c)* Botswana, *(d)* Brazil, *(e)* Mauritius, *(f)* Namibia, *(g)* New Zealand, *(h)* Paraguay, *(i)* Poland, *(j)* South Africa, *(k)* Switzerland, *(l)* Uruguay, *(m)* the USA and *(n)* Zimbabwe is considered safe for importation into and sale in the UK on animal health grounds; and if he will make a statement. [156381]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* The over-30-months rule relates solely to BSE risks and beef from animals aged over thirty months at slaughter may be imported from the countries listed as it is not considered to represent a BSE risk. The age of animals at slaughter is not relevant in respect of other animal diseases.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are being taken at border inspection points to ensure that requirements are being met with regard to the importation of meat. [160920]

Ms Quin: Under EU law all meat imported from third countries into the UK must enter at designated UK Border Inspection Posts (BIP) where it is subject to veterinary inspections. The inspection services at the BIP are the responsibility of the local authority. All consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and at least 20 per cent. of consignments are subject to physical checks in accordance with EU legislation. Each BIP's performance is monitored by MAFF on a regular basis and subject to inspection by the European Commission to ensure these standards are met.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much compensation has been paid to miners, ex-miners and miners' families in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema in *(a)* the Glasgow, Pollok constituency and *(b)* the City of Glasgow. [160833]

Mr. Hain: With regard to compensation for respiratory disease, IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered one claimant in the Glasgow, Pollok constituency, as defined by the postcodes G52 and G53. This claim has not been settled as yet.

In the City of Glasgow[1], there have been 53 claims initiated. In this region, 37 individual payments have been made, totalling £175,950.

[1] The City of Glasgow is defined by the postcodes, G1, 2, 11, 12, 14, 15, 20, 21, 32, 41, 43, 45, 51, 53, 61, 64, 72, 73, 76, 81 and 82.

Sir John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ex-miners in the Aberavon constituency suffering from pneumoconiosis and vibration white finger had been paid compensation on the last date for which figures were available; what the total amount involved was; and what the largest single payment was. [159431]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, advise me that, to date, there have been 1,264 claims registered in the constituency of Aberavon, as defined by the postcodes SA 11–13, CF34 and 42, in respect of vibration white finger (VWF). In this region, there have been 353 individual payments totalling £1.83 million. The highest single payment made to date was £21,250. This does not include claims for services, which have only recently begun to be processed. With regard to pneumoconiosis, figures are only kept nationally.

In relation to claims for coronary obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD), IRISC have, to date, registered 3,077 claims in the constituency of Aberavon, as defined above. In this region, there have been 792 individual payments totalling £3.28 million. The single highest payment to date was £51,035.

Sir John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ex-miners in the Aberavon constituency suffering from emphysema have been paid compensation at the latest date for which figures are available; what the total amount involved was; and what the largest single payment was. [160845]

Mr. Hain: The present British Coal compensation scheme for respiratory disease covers Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema and asthma in certain circumstances. Until claims are assessed, the type and level of injury suffered by claimants cannot be identified and therefore the number of claimants suffering from emphysema alone in the constituency of Aberavon cannot be determined. IRISC have, to date, registered 3,077 claims in respect of respiratory disease in the constituency of Aberavon, as defined by the postcodes SA 11–13, CF34 and 42. In this region, there have been 792 individual payments totalling £3.28 million. The single highest payment to date was £51,035.

Sellafield MOX Plant

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research he has commissioned on the technical modifications necessary to the Sellafield MOX plant to enable the plant to process plutonium for immobilisation. [159784]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* None.

British Shipbuilders

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry between which dates of employment and for which firms British Shipbuilders will pay damages for industrial injury in cases where there is an outstanding judgment. [160819]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The information requested is not held centrally and cannot be given in the time required.

Walsall (Funding)

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funding has been made available to the Borough of Walsall by his Department since June 1997. [160996]

Mr. Caborn: Since June 1997, up to the present date, the following offers of assistance have been made to businesses in the local authority district of Walsall.

36 offers of Regional Selective Assistance totalling £2,474,000 have been made. These offers have been made towards projects with total capital investment of £17,570,360 which will create 561 jobs.

Nine offers of Enterprise Grant have been made since the scheme was launched in March 2000. These offers involve grant of £269,000 and fixed capital investment of £2,087,070.

Eight offers were made under the SMART (innovation) scheme. The total amount of assistance offered was £345,554, towards company projects with total investment of £683,165.

Businesses have also been able to benefit from assistance from the Training and Enterprise Council, Business Link and a range of other DTI schemes to encourage innovation and best practice, including TCS (formerly Teaching Company Scheme).

Social Inclusion

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the funding programmes for social inclusion for which his Department is responsible that can be accessed by *(a)* national sports bodies and *(b)* local clubs and communities. [161006]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) is the current Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

All types of organisation can make bids to the £96 million Phoenix Fund, which promotes the provision of good quality business support for entrepreneurs from disadvantaged groups or neighbourhoods. However the fund does not directly support individual enterprises.

Associated Newspapers

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost to public funds was of his recent legal action against Associated Newspapers, with special reference to the costs associated with work done by officials. [160103]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* No bill for costs has yet been received.

Export Licences

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* average and *(b)* maximum length of time taken to process export licences was in 2000. [158534]

Mr. Byers: The Government aim to provide a substantive response to Standard Individual Export Licence (SIEL) applications within 20 working days, except in special circumstances. The targets are set out in a Service and Performance Code published by the Export Control Organisation (ECO), and information on performance against these targets is set out in the Government's annual reports on Strategic Export Controls. In 2000, the Government processed 57 per cent. of SIEL applications within 20 working days. Within the DTI, the ECO improved the proportion of SIEL applications on which it carried out its processing tasks within 10 working days to 79 per cent. in 2000, compared to 75 per cent. the previous year.

The average lengths of time to process the SIEL applications completed in 2000 were:

Mean: 26.5 working days

Mode: 15 working days

Median: 17 working days.

These figures do not take account of periods during which applications were referred back to exporters for further information. These referrals occur, for example, when the nature or end-use of the goods requires further clarification.

The longest time taken to process a SIEL finalised in 2000 was 222 working days. While this was unacceptably high, there will always be a significant proportion of cases that take longer than the 20 working day target, especially in view of the necessary consultation with other Departments and if circumstances in the intended destination are uncertain or if the application is particularly complex.

The Government recognise the problems that delays in the processing of licence applications can entail. All Departments involved in the process are committed to fulfilling their roles effectively and efficiently. The ECO is pursuing a number of initiatives to improve the quality of decision taking and further reduce processing times, including improving the way we work with other Departments, enhanced progress chasing particularly for such longstanding casework and a general commitment to continuous improvement.

It would entail disproportionate cost to establish the relevant figures for Open Individual Export Licence (OIEL) applications.

Kellogg Factory, Stretford

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his decision on the Kellogg of Great Britain Company Ltd.'s application to build a combined heat and power station at the Kellogg factory, Stretford, Greater Manchester. [161072]

Mr. Hain: I have today given consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to the Kellogg Company of Great Britain Limited and clearance under section 14(1) of the Energy Act 1976 to build a 65 megawatt gas-fired combined heat and power station at the Kellogg factory, Stretford, Greater Manchester. Planning permission for the station was granted subject to 36 conditions agreed with Trafford metropolitan borough council.

Copies of the decision letters are being placed in the Library of the House.

Pressure Selling

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many complaints of undue pressure selling by companies have been made by *(a)* consumers and *(b)* trading standards officers in (i) Teesside, (ii) Stockton, South and (iii) nationally in the last year; and if he will list the companies against whom complaints have been made. [160875]

Dr. Howells: I am afraid the information is not held centrally and cannot be obtained easily in the time available before the dissolution of Parliament.

LPG Companies

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will ask for the pricing policies of LPG companies to be investigated by the competition authorities; [160910]

(2) what representations he has made to LPG companies regarding their pricing system, with particular reference to the variations in price from area to area. [160909]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I have made no representations to LPG companies about their pricing policies or systems. Under UK competition legislation, it is the responsibility of the Director General of Fair Trading to monitor markets and investigate allegations of anti-competitive behaviour. It is for the Director General to decide whether action under the competition legislation is appropriate. The Director General can act if pricing levels appear to be the result of anti-competitive practices, but he has no powers to act in relation to prices as such. Any evidence of anti-competitive behaviour should be sent to the Director General.

Environmentally Friendly Fuels

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government have taken to provide incentives for research and investment into alternative environmentally friendly fuels. [160911]

Mr. Hain: The proposed Renewables Obligation will require all licensed electricity suppliers to supply a specified proportion of their electricity from renewable sources. Based on current proposals, the Obligation will provide up to £600 million by 2010 as an incentive to the renewable energy industry.

Exemption of renewable energy from the Climate Change Levy is expected to be worth about £160 million per year by 2010.

Continuing support for renewables through the Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) arrangements, which we propose to make more flexible, could rise to around £150 million per year.

The Government have announced further funding for renewables research, development and deployment in excess of £250 million over the next three years. This includes £89 million for capital grants for offshore wind, energy crops and biomass power generation, £55.5 million for an expanded DTI R&D programme, £12 million from MAFF for their energy crops planting scheme and an initial £10 million as the first phase of a market stimulation programme for solar photovoltaic roofs. It also includes £100 million to be allocated later in the year in the light of recommendations of the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit.

With regard to incentives for alternative transport fuels, the Powershift Programme, which is sponsored by DETR, provides grants towards the additional costs of buying gas and electric vehicles. The Government have also introduced a range of fiscal incentives to encourage the wider use of cleaner fuels including lower levels of fuel duty on road gas fuels.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Digital Television

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the use of single channel 2MHz digital channels for community broadcasting. [160500]

Janet Anderson: Current practice is for frequency channels comprising 8MHz which provide a single analogue terrestrial service, or one digital multiplex carrying multiple programme services. I understand from the Independent Television Commission that it is unlikely to be feasible to employ channels of only 2MHz because transmissions would not be compatible with current European transmission standards and no existing digital television receivers would be capable of receiving such transmissions, in addition to other technical constraints. In planning for the transition from analogue to digital television the Government will consider all potential uses of spectrum. A post-switchover plan will be developed providing a clearer indication of the long-term prospects for local television.

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to appoint a digital champion to help oversee and take forward the take-up of digital television services. [160201]

Janet Anderson: I have no immediate plan to appoint a digital champion, but will keep this approach under review.

Mr. Paul Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* intends to take to promote uptake of digital television and, in particular, digital terrestrial television. [161014]

Mr. Chris Smith: As we announced in "Opportunities for All in a World of Change", the Government's aim is for the UK to have the most dynamic, high quality and competitive market for digital TV in the G7, as measured by take-up, choice and cost.

The benefits of digital television are wide-reaching: it provides better picture and sound quality, enables an increased choice of programmes, both free-to-view and paid for, and can deliver new kinds of interactive broadcast services such as home shopping and home banking. Furthermore, while universal access to the internet, which is an essential objective for the Government, is not dependent on digital television, we strongly believe that the take-up of digital television does offer a valuable opportunity for many who may not otherwise seek to do so, to have access to the internet through the use of a familiar technology.

We are now the world leaders in the take-up of digital television with nearly 30 per cent. of households already enjoying the benefits of digital viewing. Digital satellite, available in around five million households, is now well advanced and we understand BSkyB will achieve the full switchover from analogue to digital later this year. The roll-out of digital cable is progressing well, with ntl and

Telewest having over one million digital customers. More than one million households have already decided to receive digital television through the terrestrial platform which requires relatively little receiving equipment and is likely to be the means by which many will continue to expect to receive their television services in the foreseeable future.

Everyday more homes move to digital but we are well aware that a significant number remain to be convinced of the benefits of making the switch. This is the reason why a number of important initiatives have been put in place recently, with the co-operation of the broadcasting industry and of the ITC, to promote the development of digital television in the UK. These initiatives are in the following areas: extension of coverage; information for consumers and research on their needs and expectations; and involvement of the stakeholders.

Government Departments and agencies are doing all that it is possible within the framework of international spectrum management arrangements to maximise the coverage of digital. We understand that the work on the equalisation of coverage across all six multiplexes—the "core coverage"—is well advanced. We have recently written to digital broadcasters, seeking their commitment to ITC plans to double the power on eight key transmitters, allowing improvement to the signal quality, giving better, more reliable reception of free-to-air and subscription services.

The involvement of the digital broadcasting industry is important in all areas: we will continue to meet all the stakeholders and ensure that the fair competition between them leads to an enterprising and consumer-friendly environment.

We intend to take a strong part in progressing the plans that the ITC is making to implement a programme providing a pilot series of neighbourhoods across the country with free conversion to digital television. Our aim in this is to understand better the practical and social issues which will be faced by people in taking decisions on switching from analogue to digital television.

These pilots will complement the findings of the Viewers Panel we established last year, and whose report, due in September, will help us to ensure that our policies are well informed by consumer concerns and needs.

We also hope that the DVB logo, now being promoted by broadcasters, manufacturers and retailers, will help consumers to purchase digital televisions with confidence so that they are not misled into buying sets with "digital features", under the mistaken impression that they are actually purchasing equipment capable of receiving digital services. We must now discuss with the industry how best to promote this scheme to be sure that all the consumers receive the appropriate information before buying a new TV set. Alongside this initiative, we must also consider whether a public information campaign will be helpful to demystify digital television.

We are committed to developing a strategic plan which will lead the UK to meet the criteria on affordability, availability and accessibility we have set to allow for full digital switchover within the period 2006 and 2010.

Football Referees

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions he has held with the Football Association about their policy of retiring referees at 42 years of age. [159832]

Kate Hoey: This is entirely a matter for the Football Association, and neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have discussed it with them. However, I understand that the age limit of 42 applies only to referees who are newly appointed to officiate at matches in the Nationwide Conference and the reserve leagues of the Premiership and the Football League. There is no age limit for officials in the recreational sport, and referees who officiate at Premiership and Football League matches may continue until they are 48.

Religious Broadcasting

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the opportunities available to Christian radio stations with analogue licences applying for digital licences. [160382]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Religious bodies are currently disqualified from holding digital radio licences and are therefore unable to apply for automatic renewal of their analogue licences, under the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1996. The White Paper "A New Future for Communications" makes clear the Government's commitment to remove the disqualification on the ownership of local digital licences by religious bodies, and invited comments on relaxing the restrictions regarding the ownership of other licences by such bodies. We are currently considering the responses made.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if Premier Christian Radio's analogue licences will automatically be renewed; and if he will make a statement. [160396]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* The Radio Authority is required automatically to re-advertise, in an open competition, all analogue local licences in areas where the number of persons, aged 15 years or over, resident in the coverage areas of that service exceeds 4.5 million. The only analogue services exempted from this requirement are those who broadcast, or are committed to broadcast, on a digital multiplex in the relevant area. As Premier Christian Radio is prohibited by current legislation from holding a digital licence, its analogue licence cannot be automatically renewed. The Government are committed to bringing forward communications legislation which would remove this prohibition.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to enable religious broadcasters to apply for terrestrial digital licences. [160395]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* The White Paper "A New Future for Communications" announced that the Government will bring forward legislation to allow religious bodies to hold a local terrestrial digital radio licence. We invited views on whether the restrictions on ownership of other terrestrial licences by religious bodies should be relaxed, and are currently considering the responses.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if applications for remaining digital radio licences for London will be determined before changes can be made to allow applications from Christian broadcasters to be entertained. [160394]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* I understand that applications for the third and final digital multiplex licence for Greater London have already been submitted, and the Radio Authority is expected to make the award in June. Legislation to correct the anomaly whereby religious bodies are prevented from holding local digital licences will be brought forward, but any such legislation could not be enacted by June.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Bradshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals he has to help tourism businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. [159904]

Janet Anderson: As a member of the rural task force, I have actively been proposing measures to help tourism businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. A package of financial measures to help tourist businesses was announced by the chairman of the task force on 20 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 191–210. In addition, an extra £24 million for RDAs across the country was announced by DETR on 7 May. This will provide direct help to thousands of rural businesses affected by the foot and mouth outbreak, including grant aid of up to £15,000. This builds on the £15 million already given to the RDAs in the four worst affected areas to provide direct support to businesses and help with promotional campaigns.

We have also announced a package of help for the promotion of tourism to both the domestic and international markets. On 6 April, my Department announced that £3.8 million in additional funding was being made available to the English Tourism Council (ETC) for an advertising and promotion campaign to restore public confidence in visiting the countryside. We also announced that £2.2 million in additional funding was being made available to the British Tourist Authority (BTA) for the promotion of tourism overseas. On 2 May, a further £12 million was made available to support the BTA's marketing campaigns to get the message across to our key overseas markets that Britain is still a great place for a holiday.

Art Galleries

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made on the joint review of the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery. [161060]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have today published the first stage report of the joint review of the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery.

The report examines the roles and functions of the galleries, and how these functions contribute to the delivery of wider DCMS and governmental objectives. It confirms that at the present the galleries' status as non-departmental public bodies is the best option for the delivering of their services and considers how the delivery of their services might be improved in the future.

The publication of the report marks the end of the first stage of the review. The second stage will take forward the recommendations of the first stage and consider how the galleries' services and functions could be provided more efficiently and effectively in the future.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the overall Legal Services Commission's budget was paid to solicitors in each of the last five years in relation to class actions in the field of clinical negligence and personal injury; and what proportion of this amount related to work which could be carried out at less cost. [160246]

Mr. Lock: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, the Legal Services Commission, and before it the Legal Aid Board, have taken a number of steps to improve control over the cost of multi-party actions (MPAs). Due to their potential expense, MPAs have been subject to contract control since 1992. An expert panel of solicitors who have experience in handling such litigation was established in 1999, and new arrangements introduced to allow only panel members and any firm already involved in the action to submit a tender for an MPA contract.

Now, under the Commission's Funding Code (introduced in April 2000), cases can be put out to competitive tender among the panel members, at or below specified hourly rates. Typically, the successful firm is then awarded a contract, which regulates the remuneration and conduct of the litigation. Specialist Commission staff manage contracted cases, and those residual cases that are not under contract. As directed by the Lord Chancellor, the Commission has set aside a budget for special cases, of which MPAs are one type. This commenced when the Commission's Funding Code came into effect. In 2001–02 this budget is £4.5 million.

Under the new scheme, the Commission will fund personal injury MPAs only when the action has a significant wider public interest. Funding by the LSC will generally be concentrated only on the central or generic work on the action, leaving individual claims to be pursued under conditional fee agreements.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much the Legal Services Commission paid in each of the last five years to claimants' solicitors in relation to the investigation and running of clinical negligence claims against the NHS; and what proportion of this amount related to payments made to solicitors in relation to the initial investigation of the viability of claims. [160245]

Mr. Lock: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Legal Services Commission records the value of main bills paid, comprising solicitors' costs, disbursements and Counsel's fees. The total figures for each year also include the value of claims which are met in full by the opponents. The net cost to the fund of clinical negligence cases is therefore less than the figures given.

	£ million
1995–96	50.6
1996–97	56.9
1997–98	64.4
1998–99	64.6
1999–2000	60.6

It is not possible to identify separately claims against the NHS from claims against GPs and dentists; nor is it possible to identify separately claims against private practitioners from those working in the NHS. The Commission does not record separately amounts claimed for different stages in proceedings, and it is therefore not possible to report separately the cost of initial investigations.Prior to the introduction of civil contracting in January 2000 clinical negligence was not separately identified as a category of advice work. The figures in the table therefore do not provide information regarding payments for advice and assistance work done under the former Green Form system.

A number of measures have been introduced to seek to improve the value for money achieved in clinical negligence cases. From August 1999 only clinical negligence specialists who hold licences with the Commission have been able to provide publicly funded services in new cases. The Commission has a contract with Action for Victims of Medical Accidents (AVMA) to provide a merits screening test in clinical negligence cases; this expertise now supports the process of deciding which cases to fund. New guidance and tougher criteria have also been introduced and are aimed at restricting funding for lower value and weaker claims. Consequently there has been an increase in the proportion of claims that were found to lack merit, and were discontinued after the initial investigation, from 51 per cent. in 1996–97 to 60 per cent. in 1999–2000. There has also been an improvement in the success rate of claims that proceed beyond the initial investigation, from 46 per cent. in 1996–97 to 61 per cent. in 1999–2000. The discontinuation at an earlier stage of cases that lack legal merit represents an improvement in value for money. The reforms are also reflected in the number of new certificates issued annually for clinical negligence claims, which are just over half the totals being issued five years ago.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Vision 20/20

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if her Department has given *(a)* practical and *(b)* financial backing of the World bank loan for the Vision 20/20 proposals; [159760]

(2) what representations she has made to the World bank in support of Vision 20/20; and what scale of World bank loan this has resulted in. [159761]

Clare Short: We share the objectives underpinning the 20/20 initiative, but have reservations about its capacity to influence implementation of poverty reduction objectives. The 20/20 idea is based on inputs rather than effective use of resources. While it encourages desirable attention to social programmes, it does not ensure that resources will be directed to the meeting of the International Development targets. As far as we are aware, the World bank is not proposing to provide financial support to the 20/20 initiative.

Chernobyl

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid and assistance the Government have provided to the people of Chernobyl since 1986; and how much is planned to be made available over the next three years. [160976]

Mr. Mullin: Most UK assistance in response to the Chernobyl disaster is provided through the European Community and through our bilateral aid programmes. In total we have spent over £42 million since 1986.

Most of our support has funded the rebuilding of the sarcophagus and essential decommissioning facilities at Chernobyl through the Chernobyl Shelter Fund and the Nuclear Safety Account.

We also give modest direct support to Chernobyl charities, especially those helping children affected by the 1986 disaster.

We expect to continue work in all these areas over the next three years.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of senior civil servants in her Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if she will make a statement. [160883]

Mr. Mullin: None. DFID's policy is that its employees should not be required to work in excess of the limits specified by the Working Time Regulations 1998 and none have been asked to do so.

Botswana

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the Government's policies in respect of poverty reduction in Botswana. [160829]

Mr. Mullin: Botswana's record in pursuing effective poverty reduction policies is one of the strongest in Africa, although many of the gains made are under threat from the HIV/AIDS epidemic. DFID has contributed substantially to the Government of Botswana's poverty reduction programmes focusing particularly on rural livelihoods, education and more recently in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In the financial year 2000–01, DFID provided around £2.5 million directly to Botswana in addition to our contributions through multilateral agencies.

EU Trade Regulations

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the Netherlands' proposals for reform of EU trade regulations relating to overseas countries and territories. [159743]

Mr. Vaz: I have been asked to reply.

The Netherlands have proposed amendments to the European Commission's proposal for a new Council Decision on the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories with the European Community (the "OCT Decision"). The Commission's proposal maintains full freedom of access to the EC market for products originating in the OCTs, subject to special provisions for rice and sugar. The Netherlands' amendments would increase the proposed quota for milled or semi-milled rice, and would allow an additional quota for sugar which has undergone processing disallowed under the Commission proposal. The Netherlands have also suggested an alternative process for the management of these quotas. The Government are still assessing the implications of these amendments. In Council working groups, discussion is at an early stage.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Racially Aggravated Offences

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Solicitor-General how many prosecutions for racially aggravated offences have been taken up by the Crown Prosecution Service; in how many cases the defendant was *(a)* convicted and *(b)* acquitted; and how many cases the Crown Prosecution Service did not pursue. [160999]

The Solicitor-General: During the period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000, the CPS received 2,417 racist incident cases from the police. Prosecutions were brought against 1,832 defendants (76 per cent.) on a total of 2,651 charges. Cases against 585 defendants (24 per cent.) were discontinued, dropped at court or could not be prosecuted because the defendant failed to appear.

Almost half (1,299) of the 2,651 charges were for racially aggravated offences under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which came into force in September 1999. A high proportion of the remaining offences contained admissible evidence of racial aggravation and were prosecuted under other legislation.

Information kept by the CPS on convictions and acquittals relates to charges rather than defendants. Guilty pleas were entered on 66 per cent. of the charges prosecuted and there were convictions after trial on a further 12 per cent. of the charges. There were acquittals on 16 per cent. of the charges and the remaining charges resulted in other forms of disposal, eg bindover without trial.

Further information is available from the CPS Racist Incident Monitoring Report 1999–2000, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Union Flag

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Solicitor-General what guidance he will give to the Crown Prosecution Service on the prosecution of motorists displaying the Union Flag on car number plates. [161033]

The Solicitor-General: The size and character of car number plates (properly known as registration marks) and of the letters and numbers shown on them is governed by the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 1971 and the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994.

There is no provision which specifically prohibits the display of items, such as the Union Flag, on a registration mark. However, an offence is committed if a registration mark fixed on a vehicle is in any way obscured. This may be as a result of fixing another item to the registration mark or by simply allowing it to become so masked by dirt as to be no longer easily distinguishable.

The offence can be dealt with only in a magistrates court and is punishable by a fine of up to £1,000. If the police refer evidence of such an offence to the Crown Prosecution Service, it will be reviewed in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors and, if appropriate, criminal proceedings will then result.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Projects

Mr. Brady: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the projects undertaken for her Department by *(a)* outside consultants, *(b)* academic researchers and *(c)* university departments since 1 May 1997, giving the total expenditure incurred in each category. [144087]

Mr. Stringer: Since 1 May 1997 my Department has let 216 projects the total value of which is as follows:

(a) Outside consultants: £13,079,903

(b) Academic researchers and university departments: £230,741.

A list of the projects undertaken with identifiable external consultancy costs has been placed in the Library.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of senior civil servants in her Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if she will make a statement. [160892]

Marjorie Mowlam: Five per cent.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the companies with which the then Minister of State for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), had discussions regarding sponsorship of the millennium dome. [148376]

Marjorie Mowlam: As shareholder of the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), the then Minister Without Portfolio, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), had contact with sponsors from time to time, but the responsibility for negotiating and securing sponsorship rested with the NMEC. It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of ministerial meetings or discussions with companies or private individuals.

Government Annual Report 1999–2000

Tony Wright: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office for what reason the Government's Annual report for 1999–2000 was issued as an unnumbered Command Paper. [158117]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government Annual Report 1999–2000 was printed and published by the Stationery Office Ltd. (ISBN number 0–10–850688–6). It was issued as an unnumbered Command Paper to provide flexibility in the production and distribution process. It was presented to Parliament, published and distributed as usual for Command Papers, as well as being available from Tesco and WH Smith.

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office on how many occasions special advisers who have left the Government since 1997 have been examined by the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments; and if she will make a statement. [160260]

Marjorie Mowlam: Under the terms of their contracts, special advisers are subject to the Business Appointment Rules set out in the Civil Service Management Code and Departmental Staff Handbooks. They are required to make an application to their employing Department for permission to take up outside appointments under the criteria set out in the rules. Where appropriate, Departments consult the Cabinet Office. Applications from the most senior staff would be referred to the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, but none has been received from special advisers at this level.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many special advisers worked in her Department from 1997 to date. [160027]

Marjorie Mowlam: Since 3 May 1997, no more than four special advisers have been in post at any one time. This includes the UK Anti Drugs co-ordinator and his Deputy who are appointed on special adviser terms.

Social Inclusion

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the funding programmes for social inclusion for which her Department is responsible that can be accessed by *(a)* national sports bodies and *(b)* local clubs and communities. [161002]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Cabinet Office is not directly responsible for any funding for social inclusion programmes.

Anti-drugs Strategy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will estimate *(a)* the numbers of deaths due to drug use and misuse, *(b)* the numbers of injuries and finished consultant episodes related to drug use and misuse and *(c)* the direct costs of care, treatment, investigation and damage caused by drug use and misuse in each year since 1995. [157835]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Office for National Statistics reports that the number of deaths due to drug misuse in 1999 was 2,943; this figure includes deaths from illicit and licit drug use. The figures provided include deaths from drug dependence, non-dependent abuse, accidents, suicides and homicide. The figures for previous years are as follows: 1998—2,922; 1997—2,858; 1996—2,721; and 1995—2,563. Figures in relation to the numbers of injuries and finished consultant episodes related to drug use and misuse are not available as they are not collected centrally.

In terms of the direct costs of treatment of drug use and misuse, the only figures available are from the treatment strand of expenditure from the Drug Action Team returns for 1998–99 and 1999–2000. The figure for 1998–99 was approximately £165.7 million and the figure for 1999–2000 was approximately £151.8 million. Information on the indirect costs of the damage resulting from drug misuse are unavailable as they are not collected centrally.

Ombudsman Review

Tony Wright: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when she expects to introduce legislation to implement the recommendations of the ombudsman review. [144200]

Mr. Stringer *[pursuant to the reply, 17 January 2001, c. 332]:* This was a major review and we have received 174 responses, which we are considering carefully. Any announcement on the outcome of the consultation will be made in due course.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the variation between actual expenditure on Housing Benefit and expenditure projected in the FSR for *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01 in (i) cash and (ii) percentage terms. [160974]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Total Housing Benefit expenditure

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Outturn	11,068	11,177	[1]—
Projected expenditure	11,221	11,247	11,257
Variance	−153	−70	[1]—
Variance (percentage)[2]	−1	−1	[1]—

[1] Not yet available.

[2] Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source:

Figures underlie those shown in the relevant Financial Statement and Budget Reports for total Social Security expenditure.

Pension Clawback

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the Irish Government concerning pension clawback. [160680]

Mr. Rooker: None.

Benefits

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the estimated total value is of the benefits available in cash and in kind, including accommodation, to a family with two unemployed adults and two children, broken down by type of benefit, in the financial year 2001–02. [160635]

Angela Eagle: There is a wide range of benefits which may be available including Jobseeker's Allowance and Child Benefit. Unemployed homeowners can benefit from help with their mortgage interest payments, while Housing Benefit can help meet accommodation costs for those who rent their homes. Council Tax Benefit is available to help meet council tax liabilities. However, the benefits and the amounts available will vary greatly depending on individual circumstances. Benefits in kind will also vary depending on the schemes operated by the local authority.

Walsall (Funding)

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what funding has been made available to the borough of Walsall by his Department since June 1997. [160997]

Angela Eagle: The Department provides subsidy to local authorities in respect of their expenditure on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and the administration of these schemes. The amounts of these subsidies paid each year to Walsall borough are in the table.

Period	*£*
June 1997 to March 1998	21,085,206
April 1998 to March 1999	26,306,110
April 1999 to March 2000	27,533,011
April 2000 to March 2001	27,933,936

Departmental Policies (Glasgow, Pollok)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Glasgow, Pollok constituency the effects on Glasgow, Pollok of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [160831]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and,

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than data at a local authority level, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Glasgow, Pollok since May 1997.

Measures in our five Budgets so far will lift over 1.2 million children nationally out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit, the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child Benefit is worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from this April: nationally about 7 million families receive child Benefit, and in Glasgow, Pollok 8,550 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over 50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997 the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 960,600; in Glasgow, Pollok the number has reduced from 3,000 to 2,000. Since May 1997 the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally; in Glasgow, Pollok the number has decreased from 2,400 to 2,300.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. So we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. Last winter (2000–01), the payment was £200 for households who qualified. Around 13,000 older people in Glasgow, Pollok received a Winter Fuel Payment.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 13,100 pensioners in Glasgow, Pollok will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic State pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over 75s of whom we estimate there are about 4,900 in Glasgow, Pollok. 3,600 pensioner families in Glasgow, Pollok are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. They are now at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

To help tomorrow's pensioners, we have introduced the new stakeholder pension which is designed to help those on moderate to higher earnings who do not have access to an occupational pension; lower to moderate earners will benefit when we introduce the State Second Pension in April 2002; and from 2003, the Pension Credit will mean that pensioners will for the first time be rewarded, not penalised, for saving.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the average length of time is that people spend on Incapacity Benefit in *(a)* Glasgow, Pollok, *(b)* the City of Glasgow, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the UK. [160830]

Mr. Bayley: The average duration of Incapacity Benefit for claims terminated in the period 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999 is 1,094 days in Scotland and 1,027 days in Great Britain. If people who leave Incapacity Benefit for Retirement Pension are excluded, the average duration is 525 days in Scotland and 500 days in Great Britain.

Notes:

1. Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claims.
2. Information is not available by constituency or local authority area.
3. The Northern Ireland Assembly is responsible for social security matters within Northern Ireland.

Vaccine Damage

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proposals he has to amend the Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme to include those who have been affected by vaccination but who are over the age of 21; [160915]

(2) if he will seek to amend the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 to allow payments to be made to a person damaged by vaccine, irrespective of the age of that person, and when the damage occurred. [160916]

Mr. Bayley: The Vaccine Damage Payments (VDP) scheme is principally aimed at those vaccinated as part of the Department of Health-recommended childhood vaccination programme, although exceptions are made in cases such as polio and rubella where such vaccinations are more routinely given into adulthood. Given this basis those claiming a VDP must generally have been vaccinated before their 18 birthday.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 27 June 2000, we propose to amend the time limit for claiming a VDP so that a claim must be made on or before the date on which a vaccinated person attains the age of 21, or within six years of the date of the vaccination to which the claim relates, whichever is the later. We have no further plans to amend age limit provisions.

State Retirement Pension (Women)

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women aged over 60 years have not claimed their state retirement pension. [160980]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available in the format requested.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if individuals who claim disablement as a result of participating in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down are entitled to receive the case notes of their application for an award from the War Pension Agency. [160495]

Mr. Bayley: No, individuals are not entitled to receive the War Pensions Agency's case notes relating to their application for a War Pension.

However, under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998, individuals will have the right of access to clerical information from 24 October 2001.

State Second Pension

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will calculate the outstanding liability to the state second pension for each of the next 40 years, in current price terms, and if all workers turning 25 years were from 2002 automatically contracted out of the state second pension at the standard occupational pension rate. [160524]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 May 2001]*: The benefit expenditure on State Second Pension is shown in the table.

£ billion

Year	*Cost*
2001–02	0.0
2002–03	0.0
2003–04	0.0
2004–05	0.1
2005–06	0.1
2006–07	0.2
2007–08	0.4
2008–09	0.5
2009–10	0.7
2010–11	0.9
2011–12	1.1
2012–13	1.3
2013–14	1.5
2014–15	1.7
2015–16	2.0
2016–17	2.2
2017–18	2.4
2018–19	2.7
2019–20	2.9
2020–21	3.2
2021–22	3.6
2022–23	4.0
2023–24	4.4
2024–25	4.9
2025–26	5.3
2026–27	5.8
2027–28	6.3
2028–29	6.9
2029–30	7.5
2030–31	8.0
2031–32	8.6
2032–33	9.1
2033–34	9.7
2034–35	10.2
2035–36	10.7
2036–37	11.3
2037–38	11.9
2038–39	12.4
2039–40	12.9
2040–41	13.5

Notes:

1. Figures are expressed in 2001–02 price terms.
2. Costs allow for the introduction of stakeholder pensions and assume State Second Pension becomes a flat-rate scheme in 2006–07.
3. There is no additional benefit expenditure for these years if all employed earners turning 25 years contract out of the State scheme from 2002.

Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158552]

Mr. Rooker: Special Advisers made no official visits overseas between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001.

Family Incomes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate is provided by his Department's Family Resources Survey of the number of couples, married or unmarried, with at least one dependent child where both partners are in paid employment or self-employment, each earning less than £34,000 per annum and whose combined income is in excess of *(a)* £38,000, *(b)* £40,000, *(c)* £45,000 and *(d)* £50,000. [159446]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The information is in the table.

The number of couples, with at least one dependent child where both partners are in paid employment, each earning less than £34,000 per annum and whose combined income from earnings are in excess of the following specified levels

Combined earnings in excess of: (£ per annum)	*Number of couples (Million)*
38,000	0.4
40,000	0.3
45,000	0.2
50,000	0.1

Notes:

1. Earnings are defined as gross payment for full-time, part-time employment and/or self-employment. The estimates of the number of couples are cumulatively above the specified earnings level and therefore should not be summed.
2. All figures are estimates and are derived from the FRS. The FRS does not include Northern Ireland, and 1998–99 is the latest year for which data are available.
3. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors that control for region, Council Tax band and a number of other demographic variables. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. All numbers are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Source:

Family Resources Survey (FRS) 1998–99

Stakeholder Pensions

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which categories of civil servants will not be offered stakeholder pensions; for what reasons; and how many people will be affected. [160124]

Marjorie Mowlam: I have been asked to reply.

A designated stakeholder arrangement will be introduced, under the access requirements of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999, for those civil servants not eligible for membership of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme. Access will therefore be mainly provided for some 12,000 casual employees.

Additionally, access to the designated stakeholder arrangement will be available to those members of the PCSPS, earning below £30,000, who wish to use this route as an alternative or supplement to the scheme's additional voluntary contribution arrangements.

Work is also being taken forward on a new pension scheme for the civil service. This will provide new entrants with a choice between improved defined benefit arrangements and a new defined contribution plan. The defined contribution plan will be delivered through stakeholder pension products. Existing members of the PCSPS will be given the choice of remaining with the current benefit structure or of paying the higher employee contributions associated with the new defined benefit arrangement. The intention is to launch the new pension scheme from 1 October 2002.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Service

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the results achieved by the Prison Service on each of its key performance indicators in 2001–01; and if he will make a statement. [161015]

Mr. Boateng: The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) results for 2000–01 for the Prison Service are given in the table. The data are provisional and subject to final validation.

The results are extremely encouraging. The improvement in security is impressive—especially the reduction in escapes from prison establishments. There were 11 last year, compared with 30 in 1999–2000 and 232 as recently as 1992–93. The downward trend in drug misuse has continued and performance is well ahead of the Public Service Agreement (PSA) target. The level of drug abuse has fallen by 49 per cent. since 1996–97. The Service met the overall target for the number of prisoners completing accredited offending behaviour programmes and increased the overall number of completions by 30 per cent. on the previous year and by more than 93 per cent. on the number achieved in 1998–99. The purposeful activity target would have been met but for a sharp rise in the prisoner population since December, and I believe, could have been met despite the increase in population had governors not responded to encouragement to concentrate investment in education and offending behaviour courses which provide high quality activity but for small numbers of prisoners.

The Director General of the Prison Service has introduced new arrangements for dealing with the high levels of staff sickness in the Service and although the basic skills targets were not met, it is very encouraging to note that prisoners achieved more than 50,000 separate certificates last year, 12,500 of them at basic skills level 2.

KPI	*Target*	*Actual*
Category A prisoner escapes	0	0
Total escapes, as a percentage of the average prison population	0.05 per cent.	0.03 per cent.
Contractor escapes, as a ratio per 20,000 prisoners handled	1:20,000	1:21,649
Proven adjudications of assault, as a percentage of the average prisoner population	9 per cent.	9.9 per cent.

KPI	*Target*	*Actual*
Rate of positive random drug tests	16	12.4
Number of voluntary drug testing compacts	28,000	77,861
Percentage of the population held two to a cell designed for one (doubling)	18 per cent.	17.2 per cent.
Average weekly purposeful hours per prisoner	24 hours	23.8 hours
The proportion of prisoners discharged with basic skills in literacy below level 2	52.8 per cent.	76.6 per cent.
The proportion of prisoners discharged with basic skills in numeracy below level 2	61.9 per cent.	67.6 per cent.
Accredited offending behaviour programme completions	5,000	6,041
Accredited sex offender treatment programme completions	1,020	848
Cost per uncrowded prison place	£27,031	£27,022
Cost per prisoner	£26,118	£27,566
Average staff sickness days	11.25 days	13.6 days
Public correspondence replied within 20 days	95 per cent.	95 per cent.
Average telephone response time (Headquarters only)	12 seconds	12 seconds
Percentage abandoned telephone calls (Headquarters only)	5 per cent.	7.2 per cent.

Mrs. G. A. Officer

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will complete consideration of the case relating to the wife of Mr. G. A. Officer, a constituent. [160733]

Mrs. Roche: Mrs. Officer was granted indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom on 28 April.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of *(a)* the number of asylum seekers dispersed throughout the UK, *(b)* the number who are locating in London and *(c)* the number being offered accommodation by the Refugee Council on behalf of the National Asylum Support Service. [160793]

Mrs. Roche: As at the end of March 2001, 23,530[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) were allocated accommodation by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and 13,470[1] (including dependants) were allocated voucher-only support by NASS.

Of the above, 520[1] were allocated accommodation in London and 9,420[1] of those allocated voucher-only support were staying in London.

It is NASS policy to offer asylum seekers accommodation outside London and the south-east. However, in special circumstances, such as medical problems, some asylum seekers are allocated accommodation in London.

As at 27 April 2001, the Refugee Council was accommodating 5,230[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) in emergency accommodation on behalf of NASS. Of these, 4,410[1] were in London.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seeker applicants opted for vouchers only, including dependants; and how many have accepted dispersal. [160790]

Mrs. Roche: As at the end of March 2001, 13,470[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) were allocated voucher-only support by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and 23,530[1] (including dependants) were allocated accommodation by NASS.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to take full financial responsibility for asylum seekers and their dependants in place of local authority responsibility. [160792]

Mrs. Roche: The Home Office assumed responsibility on 1 April 1999 for reimbursing local authorities for direct costs incurred, within unit cost limits for supporting asylum seekers. Payment is by way of grant.

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated total value is of the benefits available in vouchers, in cash and in kind, including accommodation, to an asylum-seeking family with two adults and two children which is being supported by NASS, broken down by type of benefit, in the financial year 2001–02. [160634]

Mrs. Roche: Asylum seekers in need can be supported with accommodation, subsistence or both. The current weekly value of voucher support for a family consisting of a couple and two children, aged 16 or younger, is £119.27, of which £40.00 is paid in cash vouchers. Accommodation is provided directly by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

An asylum-seeking family in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation has their utility bills paid by NASS. This in-kind support is estimated to be worth around £18 per week. In addition, NASS accommodation includes items not generally included in furnished accommodation, such as towels, bedding, cooking utensils, crockery and cutlery, at an estimated value of around £5 per week. After six months, NASS-supported asylum seekers are also eligible for a one-off payment of £50 per person.

If the children are new-born the family may be eligible for a maternity payment of £300 per child.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of asylum appeals determined were *(a)* allowed, *(b)* dismissed and *(c)* withdrawn for nationals of (i) Iraq, (ii) Somalia, (iii) Sri Lanka, (iv) Sudan, (v) Turkey, (vi) Zimbabwe and (vii) each other nationality for the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [160802]

Mrs. Roche: Asylum appeal figures by nationality for 1999 and 2000 are not available as the Immigration Appellate Authority ceased to produce them. We hope to be able to publish this information for the 2001 asylum statistics and beyond. The most recent figures refer to 1998 and are published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Asylum Statistics 1998", a copy of which is available in the Library. The information is given in the table.

Asylum appeals: Table 8.2 Outcome of appeals[1] under the 1993 and 1996 Acts determined by adjudicators of the Immigration Appellate Authority, excluding dependants, by nationality, 1998

Number of principal appellants

		Appeals determined by adjudicators[2]						
	Appeals sent to the IAA		*Allowed*		*Dismissed*		*Withdrawn*	
Nationality		*Total*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Europe								
Albania	80	75	10	10	65	86	5	4
Czech Republic	105	130	5	2	100	78	25	20
Poland	450	665	10	1	595	89	60	9
Romania	470	665	5	0	620	93	45	7
Slovak Republic	90	125	5	2	80	64	40	34
Turkey	545	1,405	530	38	805	57	70	5
Former USSR	925	635	30	5	540	85	65	10
Former Yugoslavia	165	335	50	15	140	41	145	43
Other	590	1,000	20	2	905	90	75	8
Total	3,415	5,035	655	13	3,845	76	535	11
Americas								
Colombia	560	400	40	10	315	80	40	10
Ecuador	1,240	600	5	1	525	87	70	12
Other	130	235	15	7	205	87	15	6
Total	1,930	1,230	60	5	1,045	85	125	10
Africa								
Algeria	95	235	40	17	135	58	60	25
Angola	110	500	90	18	385	78	20	4
Democratic Republic of Congo	20	195	30	15	120	62	40	21
Ethiopia	65	250	55	22	175	69	25	10
Gambia	210	380	25	6	330	87	25	7
Ghana	430	1,700	35	2	1,585	93	85	5
Ivory Coast	165	365	95	26	250	68	20	5
Kenya	360	860	85	10	730	85	50	6
Liberia	45	105	5	3	95	91	5	7
Nigeria	1,775	4,085	140	3	3,675	90	265	7
Sierra Leone	60	175	20	12	110	63	45	25
Somalia	15	25	5	19	20	67	5	15
Sudan	70	190	85	45	80	43	20	12
Tanzania	150	920	25	3	860	93	35	4
Uganda	215	495	50	10	420	85	25	5
Other	430	605	90	15	460	76	55	9
Total	4,225	11,085	875	8	9,425	85	785	7
Middle East								
Iran	35	150	60	40	75	51	15	9
Iraq	25	45	15	29	25	51	10	20
Lebanon	15	65	15	20	50	74	5	6
Other	40	100	15	13	75	72	15	15
Total	115	360	100	27	220	61	40	11
Asia								
Afghanistan	15	15	5	36	10	64	—	0
China	975	1,230	20	2	1,200	97	10	1
India	1,040	2,445	25	1	2,355	96	65	3
Pakistan	1,590	2,570	85	3	2,330	91	155	6
Sri Lanka	745	1,040	495	48	510	49	30	3
Other	320	210	10	4	185	87	20	9
Total	4,680	7,515	640	9	6,590	88	280	4
Other and nationality not known	30	95	20	22	75	75	5	3
Grant total	14,385	25,320	2,355	9	21,195	84	1,770	7

[1] Provisional estimated figures rounded to the nearest 5 with * = 1 or 2. Figures might not add up to total due to rounding. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

[2] Figures are based on the cases for which information is recorded on the Refugee Index.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the places designated as clusters for the dispersal of asylum seekers, indicating the *(a)* population and *(b)* ethnic minority population of each. [160847]

Mrs. Roche: The areas designated as clusters are listed together with population figures. Research to identify the presence of ethnic minorities included advice received from consultation with regional consortium, voluntary groups and other interested parties plus evidence from the 1991 census. Actual statistics detailing the present ethnic minority population for each cluster area are not available.

Region/cluster area	*Population estimate per cluster*
East Midlands	
Leicester	294,300
Derby	235,800
Nottingham	286,800
South Central and East	
Brighton and Hove	255,800
Hastings and St Leonards	81,400
Portsmouth	189,900
North East	
Darlington	101,400
Gateshead	198,900
Middlesbrough	145,100
Newcastle	276,100
North Tyneside	194,000
South Tyneside	154,600
Redcar and Cleveland	138,300
Hartlepool	91,900
Stockton on Tees	181,000
Sunderland	292,300
North West	
Manchester (Great Manchester)	429,800
Bolton (Great Manchester)	267,500
Bury (Great Manchester)	182,800
Oldham (Great Manchester)	219,200
Rochdale (Great Manchester)	208,200
Salford (Great Manchester)	225,900
Stockport (Great Manchester)	292,800
Tameside (Great Manchester)	220,400
Trafford (Great Manchester)	220,300
Wigan (Great Manchester)	310,500
Burnley	91,000
Blackburn	140,000
Liverpool	461,500
Nelson	29,120
Scotland	
Glasgow	619,680
Edinburgh	450,180
South West	
Bristol	402,300
Gloucester	107,400
Swindon	179,700
Taunton and Bridgewater	[1]99,700
Exeter	111,000
South Gloucestershire	241,000
Torbay	123,000
North Somerset	188,700
Bath	167,300
Plymouth	253,000
East of England	
Ipswich	113,900
Norwich	124,000
Cambridge	120,600
Great Yarmouth	89,300
Peterborough	156,000
Wales	
Wrexham	125,200
Cardiff	320,900
Newport	139,200
Swansea	229,500
Bridgend and Porthcawl	131,400
West Midlands	
Birmingham	1,013,400
Coventry	304,300
Dudley	311,500
Sandwell	290,500
Solihull	205,600
Stoke on Trent	251,500
Walsall	261,200
Wolverhampton	241,600
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Bradford/Keighley	483,300
Doncaster	290,500
Halifax	91,069
Hull	261,800
Kirklees	390,900
Leeds	727,400
Rotherham	254,400
Sheffield	531,100
Barnsley	228,100
Grimsby	90,703
Wakefield	318,800

[1] Shown as Taunton Deane

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the places on which he plans to confer cluster status for the dispersal of asylum seekers, indicating the *(a)* population and *(b)* ethnic minority population of each. [160848]

Mrs. Roche: There are already 71 cluster areas in existence, and research and consultation through the regional consortium continue in order to identify other suitable areas.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will define the boundaries of the Grimsby cluster for the dispersal of asylum seekers; and what proportion of the population the ethnic minority population represents. [160849]

Mrs. Roche: The boundary of the cluster area for Grimsby is centred on the town itself. Statistics showing what proportion of the population are from ethnic minorities are not available.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers he intends to disperse to the Grimsby cluster; and what proportion of these will be accommodated by *(a)* the local council and *(b)* private accommodation providers. [160850]

Mrs. Roche: At present the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has procured 57 bedspaces through the private sector in Grimsby, and, while further accommodation is being explored, we are not seeking to disperse large numbers there. The intention is to achieve a fair and equitable dispersal.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his proposals for widening the Grimsby cluster for asylum seekers to include Cleethorpes; and what effect they will have on the size of the ethnic minority population of the cluster. [160852]

Mrs. Roche: The National Asylum Support Service continuously researches and seeks advice on possible new cluster areas. There has been no proposal to include Cleethorpes as part of the Grimsby cluster area.

National Asylum Support Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the remit of the NASS Performance Monitoring Inspection Team; how many inspectors it employs; and what are the performance targets against which its performance is measured; [159775]

(2) what procedures are in place to investigate complaints of sub-standard accommodation from people seeking asylum who are living in accommodation contracted through NASS; how NASS monitors its performance in providing accommodation of a proper standard; and what performance targets are in place in relation to this. [159776]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has established a contract manager for each of its contracts with accommodation providers who is responsible for investigating complaints about the standard of accommodation. These investigations will either be carried out by the contract manager or by one of the chartered surveying firms employed by NASS as and when required.

The main remit of the NASS Performance Monitoring Inspection Team is the assessment of housing management put in place by all NASS contractors.

The current staffing level of the NASS Performance Monitoring Inspection Team is one Head of Inspections Senior Executive Officer (SEO), four Team Leaders Higher Executive Officer (HEO), 15 Inspectors Executive Officers (EO) and six support staff. All non-support staff are engaged in personally inspecting the accommodation and the support services that contractors are required to provide to NASS service users.

The NASS Performance Monitoring Inspections team has no formal targets for the proportion of asylum seeker accommodation to be inspected. However, regular reviews of the management practices in place by accommodation providers are undertaken together with consultation with service users and independent property inspections to ensure that accommodation services are provided to the required standard.

Terrorist Organisations

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 February 2001, to the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) *Official Report*, columns 708–09W, on terrorist organisations, what assessment he has made of the impact of proscribing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam on the Norwegian peace initiative between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government; what representations he has received from Tamil organisations in the United Kingdom since the proscription of the LTTE; what representations he has received from the Norwegian Government since the proscription of the LTTE; and what criteria he will use to consider the de-proscription of the LTTE. [160712]

Mr. Straw: In considering whether to proscribe the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), I took full account of the information available to me, including that about the Sri Lankan peace process. I am satisfied that as an organisation the LTTE is 'concerned in terrorism' as defined by the Act and that it was appropriate for me to exercise my discretion to proscribe.

Since the proscription of the LTTE was agreed by Parliament and came into force on 29 March, I have received a small number of representations from Tamil organisations. I have received none from the Norwegian Government. I would be unlikely to revisit any decision to proscribe unless the organisation concerned had demonstrated a convincing renunciation of terrorism. This approach is consistent in respect of all the 35 proscribed organisations listed in Schedule 2 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

The United Kingdom will continue to support the Norwegian Government in their efforts to facilitate peace talks.

Blakenhurst Prison

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet the Prison Service Union to discuss the regime for prisoners and staffing at HMP Blakenhurst. [160705]

Mr. Boateng: The Director General of the Prison Service has met with the Prison Service Union (PSU) representatives at Blakenhurst and assured them that the service will meet its obligations set out in the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. The Governor-designate will consult the PSU regarding arrangements for implementation of the new regime. Management of the Prison Service will then meet with the PSU representatives this month.

While we recognise that the PSU represents a number of prison officers throughout the Prison Service, the overwhelming majority choose to be represented by the Prison Officers Association (POA).

As this is an operational matter, negotiations with the PSU should be conducted by Prison Service officials and it would be inappropriate for the Secretary of State to meet them.

Drugs

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people, broken down by type of drug, were *(a)* cautioned, *(b)* proceeded against in a magistrates court and *(c)* tried at the Crown court for possession of a prescribed drug in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997, (iii) 1998, (iv) 1999 and (v) 2000, in each police authority in England and Wales. [160740]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Although information is collected on cautions and convictions for drug offences, published breakdowns are not available in the specific form detailed in the question. It would be possible to provide such information only at disproportionate cost.

However, the Area Tables of the Home Office bulletin "Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom" give breakdowns by main type of controlled drug or by main offence type for individual police force areas. In addition, the Supplementary Tables provide information at a United Kingdom level for the main drug types broken down by type of drug offence and main police and court disposals. Copies of these publications, for the period up to and including 1999, are available in the Library.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was *(a)* spent and *(b)* allocated by his Department on tackling problems relating to drugs in respect of (i) improving international co-operation to reduce supplies from abroad, (ii) increasing the effectiveness of police and Customs enforcement, (iii) maintaining effective deterrents and tight domestic controls, (iv) developing prevention publicity, education and community action and (v) improving treatment and rehabilitation in (1) 1997, (2) 1998, (3) 1999 and (4) 2000. [160739]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Home Office is one of a number of Government Departments which spend money to reduce the supply of drugs, to prevent them from being taken, to reduce their harmful effects and to break the link between drugs and crime. Their actions are brought together under the Government's 10-year National Anti-Drugs Strategy launched in May 1998, "Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain".

While we do not have information to answer all aspects of the question, it is hoped that the following may assist.

International Co-operation

In each of the financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01, the Home Office spent about £2 million providing specialist training and equipment to overseas law enforcement agencies in countries close to the source of production with the aim of improving their ability to reduce the supply of drugs to the United Kingdom. Additionally we assist in improving international co-operation through the United Kingdom's membership of Europol, the European Union and G8.

Effectiveness of Police Enforcement

The Home Office is not responsible for Customs and Excise. The total amount spent by police forces in countering the supply of drugs cannot be disaggregated from other expenditure.

Domestic Control

There are tight legislative controls on the possession and supply of controlled drugs and the maximum available penalties reflect the seriousness of the offences. Supplying Class A drugs carries a possible maximum sentence of life imprisonment and an unlimited fine and a third conviction for the supply of a Class A drug carries a minimum period of seven years' imprisonment. For the Home Office, maintaining these controls will involve police (see earlier), probation and prison costs (see later). Its costs last year were some £400,000.

Prevention and support of local initiatives

Prior to the 1999 establishment of the Drugs Prevention Advisory Service (DPAS) to provide support for local Drug Action Teams, the Drugs Prevention Initiative (DPI) was the vehicle by which the Home Office provided an evidence base for disseminating good practice. The spend during the period 1997 to 2000, covering both organisations, was:

£

	Drug Action Team development funding[1]	*Arrest referral*[2]	*DPI/DPAS grants*	*Research and evaluation*
1997–98	n/a	n/a	1,855,340	382,000
1998–99	n/a	n/a	1,725,647	364,223
1999–2000	5,035,000	332,540	246,979	152,098
2000–01	5,817,000	8,707,000	669,532	164,304

[1] Funds were previously disbursed by the Department of Health (DH). Earlier information unavailable. Includes 2000–01 additional spend on DH behalf for recruitment of drug workers.

[2] £20 million has been allocated for the setting up of arrest referral schemes over the three years up to 2001–02.

Treatment and Rehabilitation

All spending by probation areas on drug treatment and rehabilitation came out of the general probation grant allocations. There was no hypothecated drug funding. The figures available for actual drug spending relate to expenditure on drug partnerships.

	Drugs	*Drugs/alcohol*[1]	*Drug treatment and testing orders (DTTO)*
1997–98	1,852,378	558,378	—
1998–99	1,903,746	851,899	798,000
1999–2000	n/a	n/a	1,000,000
2000–01	n/a	n/a	20,000,000

[1] Where spending on drugs could not be disaggregated from spending on alcohol

The Prison Service allocation on tackling drug misuse was:

	Supply reduction and testing[1]	*Treatment and prevention*
1997–98	2,230,000	6,780,000
1998–99	2,230,000	6,780,000
1999–2000	12,195,000	19,390,000
2000–01	12,009,000	23,292,000

[1] Includes Headquarters costs

Notes:

1. First pilots established in 1998–99
2. Further spend in 1999–2000 to support pilots
3. A further £20 million in 2000–01
4. £2 million was transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department
5. The rest went to probation areas for national roll out of DTTOs from October 2000.

West Mercia Constabulary (Shrewsbury Division)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the capital improvement projects in the Shrewsbury Division of West Mercia Constabulary since May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [160512]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Most capital projects are entirely a matter for police authorities and forces. The Chief Constable of West Mercia

Constabulary informs me that capital improvements in the Shrewsbury Division have been as follows:

Year	*Project*
1997	Alteration of Police House to create the new Pontesbury Police Station
1999	New Build—Bishop's Castle Police Station
1999	Alteration of Police House to create the new Craven Arms Police Station
2000 to date	Creation of an open plan Intelligence Cell from cellular offices, Shrewsbury Divisional Head Quarters
2000 to date	New Build—Ludlow Police Station

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, for the period between the commencement of the home detention curfew scheme and 30 April inclusive *(a)* the number of prisoners released on the scheme, *(b)* the number of prisoners convicted of each offence who were released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, including offences committed by prisoners normally classified under the categories (i) other homicide and attempted homicide, (ii) other violence against the person, (iii) drug offences, (iv) assaults and (v) other offences, including a breakdown of the prisoners normally classified in the sub-category of other offences called other offences, *(c)* the average sentence (i) received and (ii) served, and the average period spent on the scheme, in respect of each offence, *(d)* the number of prisoners released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, who (i) breached the conditions of the curfew, (ii) disappeared and were recaptured, (iii) disappeared and remain unlawfully at large and (iv) had their licences revoked with reasons, *(e)* a breakdown of the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme while on the scheme, including offences committed, by prisoners who committed more than one offence and *(f)* a breakdown of the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme who committed a further offence while on the scheme that was similar in character to that for which they were originally convicted, including offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence; and if he will make a statement. [159869]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I have written to the right hon. Member and placed a copy of the letter in the Library.

Imprisonment Rates

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the imprisonment rate was as a percentage of crimes committed for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other European countries in the latest year for which information is available. [160971]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The latest available information on the attrition rate in England and Wales was published in December 1999 in "Digest 4: Information on the criminal justice system in England & Wales". This indicates that, for the offences of criminal damage, theft of a motor vehicle, theft from a motor vehicle (including attempts), bicycle theft, domestic burglary, wounding, robbery/theft from the person, 0.3 per cent. of the offences committed in 1997 resulted in a custodial sentence.

Similar information is not available for other European countries. However, information based on a survey conducted by the Council of Europe on the percentage of persons convicted who received custodial sentences for certain offences was published in February last year in the Statistical Bulletin 04/00, "International comparisons of criminal justice statistics 1998".

Copies of both these documents are available in the Library.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160884]

Mr. Straw: Less than 4 per cent. of senior civil servants in my Department have signed such waivers. The standard terms and conditions of service for staff employed by the Home Office are well within the limits set by the Working Time Regulations.

Severe Personality Disorders

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funds his Department has allocated to the pilot assessment projects for those with dangerous and severe personality disorder for the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02. [160637]

Mr. Boateng: Money allocated to fund dangerous and severe personality disorder (DSPD) pilot projects—for assessment and treatment—for those who are dangerous and severely personality disordered is as follows:

Year	*Spent (£)*
1999–2000	0
2000–01	554,353

Following the Spending Review 2000, substantial capital and current funds have been allocated in the both the Home Office and the Department of Health for the development of further pilot projects. For 2001–02 the Home Office allocation is:

Current—£11 million

Capital—£9 million.

Police (Injuries)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police officers have received firearms injuries while on duty in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [160805]

(2) how many police officers have received firearms injuries from a police firearm *(a)* while on duty and *(b)* in training in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [160806]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate collates statistics of notifiable offences recorded by the police, in which police officers on duty are injured by a firearm. The table records numbers of incidents in England and Wales since 1989. Data for 2000–01 are not yet available.

No distinction is made regarding how the firearm was used in causing the injury, who caused the injury, or whether it was incurred on duty or in training.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in which a police officer on duty was injured by a firearm

England and Wales *Number of offences*

	Fatal injury	*Serious injury*[1]	*Slight injury*	*Total*
1989	1	2	8	11
1990	1	2	2	5
1991	—	5	2	7
1992	[2]1	3	6	10
1993	1	3	6	10
1994	—	12	9	21
1995	1	9	5	15
1996	—	4	5	9
1997	—	2	4	6
1997–98	—	3	3	6
1998–99	—	—	11	11
1999–2000	—	—	10	10

[1] A serious injury is one which necessitated detention in hospital or involved fractures, concussion, severe general shock, penetration by a bullet or multiple shot wounds.

[2] Special constable.

Police firearms officers undertake rigorous training and their use of firearms is governed by ACPO (the Association of Chief Police Officers) guidelines.

Crime Clear-up Rates

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average crime clear-up rate was in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; how many recorded crimes were not cleared up in each year; and if he will make a statement. [160796]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The table shows the clear-up rates for recorded crime in England and Wales since 1990, together with the total number of recorded crimes that were not cleared up in this period.

Recorded crime clear-up (or detection) rate and notifiable offences not cleared up

	Percentage clear-up rate	*Number of offences not cleared up*
1990	32	2,984,209
1991	29	3,595,853
1992	26	3,992,623
1993	25	3,988,955
1994	26	3,706,081
1995	26	3,606,069
1996	26	3,580,686
1997	28	3,202,396
1998–99	29	3,611,970
1999–2000	25	3,964,272

Notes:

1. Offences of Criminal damage £20 and under have been excluded up to 1997; all criminal damage is included thereafter.

2. New guidance was issued in April 1999 that tightened up the conditions under which a crime can be detected. One of its principal features was the removal of post-sentence visits as a method of detection

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 11 April and 2 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. S. Anjum. [160967]

Mr. Straw: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 10 May.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to answer the letter to him dated 26 March from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to the Dahem family. [160969]

Mr. Straw: I will write to my right hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to answer the letter to him dated 10 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mujibur Rahman. [160966]

Mr. Straw: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 9 May.

Crime Reduction Programme

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the initiatives *(a)* under way and *(b)* planned as part of his Crime Reduction Programme, indicating the objectives, expected duration and cost to public funds of each initiative. [159017]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) is the biggest single investment in an evidence-based approach to crime reduction which has ever taken place in any country. Knowledge gained will contribute to reversing the long-term growth rate in crime and ensuring we are achieving the greatest impact for the money spent. Projects which are successful will form the basis of future mainstream programmes; those which are not will be dropped.

All of the initiatives in the table are under way; no new initiatives are planned as part of the Crime Reduction Programme. CRP projects are of differing duration, but all CRP initiatives are due to finish by 31 March 2002 although some will, exceptionally and with prior approval, be completed in 2002–03.

Crime Reduction Programme

£ million

Initiative	*Objective*	*Actual expenditure for 1999–2000*	*Provisional final expenditure for 2000–01*	*Forecast expenditure for 2001–02*
Reducing Burglary	To reduce burglary nationally by targeting areas with worst domestic burglary problems	2.1	9.2	18.5
Locks for the over-60s	To improve security for low-income pensioners in high crime areas	0	0.9	3.0
Summer Schemes	To engage in constructive activities 13 to 17-years-olds in high crime neighbourhoods	0	1.9	1.7
Prostitution—What Works	To find out what works in reducing crime/disorder associated with prostitution	0	0.04	1.0
Targeted Policing	To help develop problem oriented approach to local crime/disorder problems	0.5	9.4	18.6
'On Track'	Long-term initiative aimed at children at risk of getting involved in crime	0.2	5.0	[1]0
Vehicle Crime Publicity	To increase motorists' awareness of vehicle security issues	0	8.0	[2]0
Treatment of Offenders	To develop effective practice on what reduces re-offending	2.3	7.8	8.2
Drug Arrest Referrals	Development of arrest referral schemes to impact upon drug-related offending	0.3	8.8	10.5
Schools Intervention	To integrate schools' management of pupils' behaviour and reduction in truancies and exclusions	0.2	6.1	5.4
Violence Against Women	To develop and implement local strategies for reducing domestic violence and rape/sexual assault by known perpetrators	0.09	2.0	7.1
Vehicle Crime	To help prevent stolen vehicles being given new identity and reduce number of cars stolen for resale	0	0.5	2.6
Youth Inclusion	Multiple intervention package for most at risk 13 to 16-year-olds in deprived neighbourhoods	0	2.75	2.75
Sentencing Practices	To maximise impact of sentences on crime reduction	0.3	0.9	3.2
Neighbourhood Wardens	To pump-prime new and existing warden schemes	0	0.9	3.0
Design Against Crime	To increase crime resistance of new products, designs and systems	0.6	0.5	1.1
Arson Control Forum	To contribute to 30 per cent. reduction in number of deliberate fires by 31 March 2009	0	0.1	[2]0
Offenders Index	To provide a criminal career database on the offender population	0.075	0.2	0
Suzy Lamplugh Trust	To support the establishment of a Centre for Personal Safety	0	0.2	0.3
CCTV Initiative	Capital funding of CCTV projects	0	23.4	101.3
Rape Crisis Federation	To support and develop rape crisis groups	0	0	0.4
Toolkits	Production of toolkits to assist partnerships in crime reduction work	0	0.1	0.4
Total		6.7	88.7	189.05

[1] Responsibility for funding 'On Track' transferred to DfEE's Children's Fund with effect from 1 April 2001

[2] No longer funded by Crime Reduction Programme

Lord Birt

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Lord Birt met representatives of *(a)* Victim Support and *(b)* other victims' organisations in his capacity as the Government's adviser on crime. [158256]

Mr. Straw: I understand that Lord Birt met representatives of Victim Support on 30 January 2001 and that he met representatives of Crime Concern on 30 January and the National Association of Care and Resettlement of Offenders on 14 February 2001.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criminal justice organisations Lord Birt has met in his capacity as the Government's adviser on crime; and when. [158257]

Mr. Straw: I understand that over the months since his appointment in July 2000 Lord Birt has met the following organisations involved in criminal justice and crime reduction:

Home Office
Lord Chancellor's Department
Crown Prosecution Service
HM Customs and Excise
Department for Education and Employment
Youth Justice Board
Association of Chief Police Officers
UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator
Social Exclusion Unit
Northumbria Police
Sunderland Youth Offending Team
Nottingham County Council; Nottingham Sure Start; Youth Offending Team
Aylesbury Youth Offender Institution
HM Prison Brixton
National Criminal Intelligence Service
National Crime Squad
Parole Board for England and Wales
National Probation Service
Victim Support
National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
Crime Concern.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Lord Birt met representatives of *(a)* ACPO, *(b)* the Police Superintendents' Association and *(c)* the Police Federation in his capacity as the Government's adviser on crime. [158258]

Mr. Straw: I understand that Lord Birt met the President of the Association of Chief Police Officers on 19 December 2000.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Peter Bleach

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has received to the letter which he sent to the Indian Government about the imprisonment of Peter Bleach; and if he will make a statement. [158444]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not yet received a reply to his letter of 4 December 2000 to the Indian Government asking for Peter Bleach to be released on the grounds of fair and equal treatment with his co-convicted who have already been released. He sent a reminder on 29 January. Our High Commissioner in New Delhi has followed up the Foreign Secretary's request with key players in the Indian Government. My noble Friend Baroness Scotland, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, called in the Indian High Commissioner on 7 March to remind him of the Foreign Secretary's request. I also raised the case with the Indian High Commissioner on 22 March.

EU Secret Documents

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards classification of EU documents graded as Top Secret. [158753]

Mr. Vaz: EU security regulations provide for classification of EU documents graded as Top Secret and set out the rationale for doing so. It is right that where institutions of the European Union hold information that is Top Secret, they should handle that information with appropriate care as provided for in the relevant security regulations.

Council of Europe Conventions

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the conventions of the Council of Europe which the UK has yet to ratify. [158747]

Mr. Vaz: There are 16 conventions of the Council of Europe which the UK has not yet ratified. They are:

1. Protocol no.4 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, securing certain rights and freedoms other than those included in the Convention and in Protocol no.1
2. Convention relating to stops on bearer securities in international circulation
3. Convention on the establishment of a scheme of registration of wills
4. European Convention on the Control of the acquisition and possession of Firearms by individuals
5. European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter
6. Protocol amending the European Social Charter
7. European Social Charter (revised)
8. Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in public life at local level
9. European Convention relating to questions on copyright law and neighbouring rights in the framework of Transfrontier Broadcasting by satellite
10. Agreement on illicit traffic by sea, implementing article 17 of the United Nations Convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances
11. Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education in the European region
12. Criminal law convention on corruption
13. European agreement relating to persons participating in proceedings of the European Court of Human Rights
14. Sixth protocol to the general agreement on privileges and immunities of the Council of Europe
15. Civil law convention on corruption
16. European Convention on the promotion of a Transitional long-term voluntary service for young people

Entry Clearance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs further to his answer of 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 529W, on entry clearance, what proportion of the cases in which he intervened pertain to families of individuals known to him personally; and if he will make a statement. [158811]

Mr. Vaz: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 27 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 420W.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for how long on average a person who applied for entry clearance for settlement in *(a)* June 2000, *(b)* July 2000, *(c)* August 2000, *(d)* September 2000, *(e)* October 2000, *(f)* November 2000, *(g)* December 2000, *(h)* January 2001, *(i)* February 2001 and *(j)* March 2001 will have to wait for an interview in each queue at each post in the Indian sub-continent. [160093]

Mr. Vaz: The statistics are as follows:

Waiting times in weeks for settlement applications

	2000							*2001*		
Post/Queue	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*
Bombay										
Q1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q2	6	5	4	4	4	6	6	6	6	6
Q3	6	5	4	4	4	6	6	6	8	6
Q4	6	5	4	4	4	6	6	6	6	6
New Delhi										
Q1	0	0	0	4	4	4	0	0	0	0
Q2	12	12	13	16	15	10	10	15	15	12
Q3	12	12	13	16	15	10	10	15	15	12
Q4	12	12	13	16	15	10	10	15	15	12

Waiting times in weeks for settlement applications

	2000							2001		
Post/Queue	*June*	*July*	*August*	*September*	*October*	*November*	*December*	*January*	*February*	*March*
Dhaka										
Q1	20	22	22	18	16	14	14	12	14	16
Q2	28	30	28	28	26	24	21	20	22	24
Q3	20	22	22	18	16	14	14	12	12	16
Q4	44	44	42	44	40	36	35	35	34	38
Islamabad										
Q1	5	5	4	5	3.5	3	4	0	7	5
Q2	20.5	19	19	18.5	18	18	17	0	15	13
Q3	29	27	25.5	24	22	22	20	0	18	16
Q4	36	36	33	31	31	29	28	0	25	23
Calcutta[1]	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Colombo[1]	10	8	8	7	10	0	0	5	5	4
Karachi[1]	3	7	9	8	10	12	11	12	8	5
Madras[1]	8	6	7	5	3	7	7	6	7	7

[1] Calcutta, Colombo, Karachi and Madras operate as a single settlement queue

Notes:

Q1—Right of abode cases and Dependant Relatives over 65

Q2—Spouses and Children under 18

Q3—Fiancé(e)s and other First Time Applicants

Q4—Re-applicants

EU Single Sky Initiative

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Spain regarding the European Union's single sky proposals; and if he will make a statement. [159580]

Mr. Vaz: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last discussed the matter with his Spanish counterpart on 9 April. The Government fully support the EU single sky initiative, which should benefit UK industry and consumers. The Stockholm European Council on 23–24 March called for progress on this issue before the next European Council in Gothenburg on 15–16 June.

Regional and Minority Languages

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provision he has made in accordance with his commitments under Article 12, paragraph 3 of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages to reflect the *(a)* Irish, *(b)* Welsh and *(c)* Scots Gaelic languages and culture; and what the estimated cost of such provision is in each of the next four years. [159498]

Mr. Vaz: There is no fixed budget for honouring this commitment over the next four years, but the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Devolved Administrations, who are responsible for implementing these measures, have a number of programmes in hand.

The Scottish Executive and the Northern Ireland Executive have allocated a total of £310,000 in 2001–02 for the Columba Initiative in co-operation with the Republic of Ireland to promote links between speakers of Irish and Scots Gaelic in both Scotland and the whole island of Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Administration is committed to a number of projects, including a £2.53 million subsidy for the Irish Language Agency under the Good Friday Agreement, and a touring exhibition of all the languages used in Northern Ireland, both of which will benefit the Republic of Ireland. The NIA has also, in conjunction with the British Council and the Arts Council in the Republic of Ireland, funded a number of events to promote Irish culture in countries such as France, Germany and the USA, and will continue to offer support where appropriate to similar future initiatives.

The National Assembly for Wales announced in April 2000, funding worth £130,000 over three years, in support of a project to support the Welsh Language and Culture in the Chubut province of Argentina. The project is managed for the Assembly by the British Council in collaboration with the Wales-Argentina Society and Cardiff University's Welsh Language Teaching Centre for Adults.

Your Britain, Your Europe Roadshow

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 549W, on the Your Britain, Your Europe Roadshow, at what level and on what date the decision was made to *(a)* postpone and *(b)* cancel the initiative. [159555]

Mr. Vaz: In early January I decided that this visit would have to be postponed. It was subsequently rescheduled for 20 March. Following consultations with officials in the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Office, by late February it was clear that this date would not be convenient for their Ministers. On 28 February I decided to cancel the visit. I hope it will be reinstated in the near future.

Turkey

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Turkish authorities regarding the hunger strikers in Turkish prisons. [159924]

Mr. Vaz: We are very concerned about the continuing hunger strikes in some Turkish prisons. Our Ambassador in Ankara raised our concern about the deaths of hunger strikers with the Turkish Government on 12 April. Our Embassy in Ankara again raised our concerns at the growing number of deaths with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 26 April.

Entertainment Budgets

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the entertainment budget for his Department was in each year from 1997 to date. [160101]

Mr. Wilson: Total worldwide entertainment expenditure amounted to £10.3 million in 1997–98, £9.3 million in 1998–99 and £11.2 million in 1999–2000. Figures for 2000–01 are not yet available. Expenditure on entertainment covers a wide range of activities including promotional and trade events, receptions in honour of high-level visitors, and events to establish and cultivate contacts; all were undertaken in pursuit of FCO objectives, both at home and in our 224 Posts overseas.

In addition, the FCO-administered Government Hospitality Fund, drawn upon by all Government Departments when entertaining overseas visitors, spent £1.2 million in 1997–98, £1.8 million in 1998–99, and £1.3 million in 1999–2000.

Turkmenistan

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 132W, on Turkmenistan, if he has received a formal response from the Turkmen authorities concerning the continuing incarceration of Shageldy Atakov; what representations he is making to the Turkmen authorities on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [160144]

Mr. Vaz: The British Government, along with their EU Partners, have not yet received a formal response from the Turkmen Foreign Minister concerning the detention of Mr. Atakov. EU Embassies in Ashgabat have requested a further meeting with the Foreign Minister to remind him of our concern. We also raised Mr. Atakov's situation with the Deputy Foreign Minister in April.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what involvement his Department has had in attempts to reach a settlement between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. [159852]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not played a direct role in the international mediation that has taken place in an effort to resolve the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk group, America, Russia and France are leading the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The UK has constantly encouraged both sides to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Gibraltar

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress there has been in complying with the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in relation to the franchise for Gibraltarians for elections to the European Parliament; when the Court decision was made; and if he will make a statement. [160146]

Mr. Vaz: The Matthews judgment, given on 18 February 1999, requires the UK to extend the European Parliamentary franchise to Gibraltar. The UK unequivocally accepts this obligation.

The UK has proposed an amendment to the 1976 EC Act on Direct Elections to extend the franchise to Gibraltar. This amendment remains on the agenda of the relevant Council working group. But HMG are considering other options in order to extend the franchise before the 2004 European Parliament elections.

Family Visit Visas

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will provide a breakdown, by entry clearance post, of the number of family visit visa refusals in relation to which *(a)* an appeal was received, *(b)* a refusal was overturned by an entry clearance manager after receipt of an appeal and *(c)* an appeal was despatched in April; [160463]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, by entry clearance post, of the number of family visit visa applications *(a)* received, *(b)* determined, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* refused in April. [160461]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Statistical information is received monthly only from the 100 largest posts. The remaining 64 posts submit information on an annual basis. To answer this question for all 164 posts we would have to ask the annual reporting posts to provide the information requested. This could only be done at disproportionate cost.

The monthly reporting posts are not required to submit statistical information on any given month until the middle of the following month. So information for April is not yet available. I will write to the hon. Member when it becomes available.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many family visit visa applications were *(a)* received, *(b)* determined, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* refused by (i) the largest 100 entry clearance posts and (ii) all entry clearance posts in the first quarter of 2001. [160462]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* (i) Our latest information from the 100 largest entry clearance posts which submit monthly statistical data is shown in the table.

(ii) the remaining 64 posts submit information on an annual basis. To answer this question for all 164 posts we would have to ask the annual reporting posts to provide the information requested. This could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Family visit visa applications 2001—top 100 posts

	Applications received			*Applications determined*		
	January	*February*	*March*	*January*	*February*	*March*
1. Abidjan	19	29	16	20	22	19
2. Abu Dhabi	24	34	34	23	35	34
3. Abuja	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
4. Accra	753	1,694	1,857	685	782	1,962
5. Addis Ababa	31	12	15	39	11	15
6. Almaly	36	13	20	37	13	20
7. Amman	426	85	58	0	85	58
8. Amsterdam	38	34	34	38	34	34
9. Ankara	29	38	19	29	38	19
10. Bahrain	16	10	2	16	10	2
11. Baku	19	9	8	19	9	8
12. Bandar Seri Begawan	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
13. Bangkok	80	173	361	73	154	277
14. Banjul	38	34	49	40	31	32
15. Beirut	92	62	82	89	62	78
16. Belgrade	258	391	320	4	352	290
17. Bogota	33	33	47	33	33	47
18. Bombay	619	1,070	1,787	619	1,070	1,791
19. Bratislava	50	122	184	50	118	171
20. Brussels	14	10	35	4	7	22
21. Bucharest	58	85	109	59	90	110
22. Budapest	6	7	5	6	7	5
23. Cairo	137	145	146	129	142	143
24. Calcutta	94	118	[illegible]	97	120	225
25. Canberra	7	15	[illegible]	7	16	15
26. Casablanca	117	119	115	110	116	115
27. Chicago	141	176	200	119	162	190
28. Colombo	70	74	161	70	74	49
29. Copenhagen	44	36	42	44	36	39
30. Damascus	0	0	15	0	0	15
31. Dar Es Salaam	107	104	191	107	104	191
32. Dhaka	451	490	502	348	415	437
33. Doha	49	31	24	49	31	24
34. Dubai	71	79	75	75	81	51
35. Dublin	36	21	20	36	18	18
36. Dusseldorf	106	272	383	100	246	332
37. Ekaterinburg	11	16	24	11	16	24
38. Geneva	25	74	63	21	67	61
39. Georgetown	33	74	63	33	25	61
40. Guangzhou	121	143	[1]—	90	91	[1]—
41. Hanoi	4	3	5	4	3	4
42. Harare	0	1	[1]—	0	1	[1]—
43. Havana	3	0	0	3	0	0
44. Hong Kong	32	34	40	32	37	5
45. Islamabad	2,326	2,225	3,411	1,512	1,120	2,864
46. Istanbul	430	453	227	485	522	231
47. Jakarta	36	58	62	37	56	61
48. Jedda	0	0	0	0	0	0
49. Jerusalem	5	9	13	5	29	13
50. Kampala	116	102	156	120	84	142
51. Karachi	575	420	495	460	82	495
52. Kathmandu	0	1	0	0	0	0
53. Khartoum	44	15	45	15	16	49
54. Kiev	83	[1]—	[1]—	20	[1]—	[1]—
55. Kingston	52	68	130	46	70	132
56. Kuala Lumpur	14	12	20	13	13	20
57. Kuwait	200	43	28	200	43	28
58. Lagos	1,147	1,193	1,718	901	1,293	1,509
59. Lima	12	27	29	12	30	29
60. Los Angeles	0	216	320	0	216	320
61. Luanda	8	2	14	8	2	3
62. Lusaka	0	55	65	0	19	65
63. Madras	217	229	490	233	226	544
64. Madrid	26	37	26	26	37	26
65. Manila	0	129	[1]—	0	129	[1]—
66. Minsk	0	14	20	0	14	18

Family visit visa applications 2001—top 100 posts

	Applications received			*Applications determined*		
	January	*February*	*March*	*January*	*February*	*March*
67. Moscow	237	214	286	228	191	268
68. Muscat	75	39	65	72	39	65
69. Nairobi	156	164	203	156	164	203
70. New Delhi	913	1,153	1,335	907	1,129	1,244
71. New York	533	558	650	511	549	635
72. Nicosia	0	[1]—	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—
73. Oslo	30	44	92	27	42	89
74. Ottawa	475	278	364	442	185	255
75. Paris	286	253	296	0	248	328
76. Peking	109	63	288	94	51	288
77. Port Louis	80	136	275	80	136	275
78. Port of Spain	5	0	20	5	0	20
79. Prague	0	0	0	0	0	0
80. Pretoria	27	25	9	20	13	11
81. Quito	24	14	17	24	14	16
82. Riga	11	6	[1]—	11	12	[1]—
83. Riyadh	8	15	[1]—	12	20	[1]—
84. Rome	63	90	99	61	80	92
85. Sana'a	20	13	12	20	10	11
86. Sarajevo	61	119	159	61	119	159
87. Shanghai	10	30	116	10	30	116
88. Singapore	21	26	39	24	25	37
89. Sofia	89	118	120	74	117	114
90. St. Petersburg	0	0	65	0	0	65
91. Sto Domingo	6	0	0	6	0	0
92. Stockholm	89	103	105	129	123	116
93. Taipei	0	0	0	0	0	0
94. Tashkent	13	5	13	13	5	13
95. Tbilisi	0	0	0	0	0	0
96. Tehran	0	0	[1]—	0	0	0
97. Tirana	21	21	15	15	23	15
98. Tokyo	5	5	11	5	4	12
99. Tunis	97	92	105	87	70	105
100. Valletta	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Total	13,053	14,862	19,376	10,555	12,164	18,094

[1] Information not yet received from posts

	Applications issued			*Applications refused*		
	January	*February*	*March*	*January*	*February*	*March*
1. Abidjan	19	21	18	1	1	1
2. Abu Dhabi	17	29	32	6	6	2
3. Abuja	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
4. Accra	277	757	1,060	408	25	902
5. Addis Ababa	14	6	10	25	5	5
6. Almaly	37	13	20	0	0	0
7. Amman	0	84	57	0	1	1
8. Amsterdam	32	30	32	6	4	2
9. Ankara	28	38	17	1	0	2
10. Bahrain	16	10	0	0	0	2
11. Baku	18	9	7	1	0	1
12. Bandar Seri Begawan	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
13. Bangkok	45	131	253	28	23	24
14. Banjul	32	20	20	8	11	12
15. Beirut	87	61	77	2	1	1
16. Belgrade	0	347	289	4	5	1
17. Bogota	25	29	46	8	4	1
18. Bombay	454	874	1,419	165	196	372
19. Bratislava	47	115	171	3	3	0
20. Brussels	3	5	22	1	2	0
21. Bucharest	48	82	102	11	8	8
22. Budapest	5	7	4	1	0	1
23. Cairo	113	124	132	16	18	11
24. Calcutta	95	116	224	2	4	1
25. Canberra	4	13	15	3	3	0
26. Casablanca	105	114	106	5	2	9
27. Chicago	119	162	190	0	0	0
28. Colombo	32	48	0	38	26	49
29. Copenhagen	44	36	39	0	0	0
30. Damascus	0	0	11	0	0	4
31. Dar Es Salaam	93	83	172	14	21	19

	Applications issued			*Applications refused*		
	January	*February*	*March*	*January*	*February*	*March*
32. Dhaka	203	227	234	145	188	203
33. Doha	46	31	21	3	0	3
34. Dubai	47	47	33	28	34	18
35. Dublin	34	16	17	2	2	1
36. Dusseldorf	94	241	332	6	5	0
37. Ekaterinburg	11	16	24	0	0	0
38. Geneva	20	66	57	1	1	4
39. Georgetown	28	20	57	5	5	4
40. Guangzhou	84	85	[1]—	6	6	[1]—
41. Hanoi	2	1	1	2	2	3
42. Harare	0	0	[1]—	0	1	[1]—
43. Havana	3	0	0	0	0	0
44. Hong Kong	27	32	3	5	5	2
45. Islamabad	1,112	1,059	1,664	400	61	1,200
46. Istanbul	424	451	207	61	71	24
47. Jakarta	33	50	49	4	6	12
48. Jedda	0	0	0	0	0	0
49. Jerusalem	5	9	13	0	20	0
50. Kampala	100	59	114	20	25	28
51. Karachi	397	19	345	63	63	150
52. Kathmandu	0	0	0	0	0	0
53. Khartoum	5	6	45	10	10	4
54. Kiev	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	20	[1]—	[1]—
55. Kingston	35	59	118	11	11	14
56. Kuala Lumpur	10	11	12	3	2	8
57. Kuwait	196	39	23	4	4	5
58. Lagos	688	1,143	1,316	213	150	193
59. Lima	8	26	28	4	4	1
60. Los Angeles	0	216	318	0	0	2
61. Luanda	8	1	3	0	1	0
62. Lusaka	0	7	58	0	12	7
63. Madras	216	211	511	17	15	33
64. Madrid	26	37	26	0	0	0
65. Manila	0	59	[1]—	0	70	[1]—
66. Minsk	0	13	18	0	1	0
67. Moscow	223	190	261	5	1	7
68. Muscat	68	36	63	4	3	2
69. Nairobi	132	141	167	24	23	36
70. New Delhi	573	682	777	334	447	467
71. New York	500	547	633	11	2	2
72. Nicosia	0	[1]—	[1]—	0	[1]—	[1]—
73. Oslo	27	41	89	0	1	0
74. Ottawa	442	184	252	0	1	3
75. Paris	0	246	325	0	2	3
76. Peking	88	40	238	6	11	50
77. Port Louis	73	126	263	7	10	12
78. Port of Spain	5	0	20	0	0	0
79. Prague	0	0	0	0	0	0
80. Pretoria	16	11	7	4	2	4
81. Quito	20	14	16	4	0	0
82. Riga	11	6	[1]—	0	6	[1]—
83. Riyadh	9	9	[1]—	3	11	[1]—
84. Rome	60	77	91	1	3	1
85. Sana'a	8	1	6	12	9	5
86. Sarajevo	61	117	158	0	2	1
87. Shanghai	8	23	107	2	7	9
88. Singapore	18	25	37	6	0	0
89. Sofia	71	113	114	3	4	0
90. St. Petersburg	0	0	61	0	0	4
91. Sto Domingo	5	0	0	1	0	0
92. Stockholm	128	121	116	1	2	0
93. Taipei	0	0	0	0	0	0
94. Tashkent	12	4	11	1	1	2
95. Tbilisi	0	0	0	0	0	0
96. Tehran	0	0	[1]—	0	0	[1]—
97. Tirana	15	20	15	0	3	0
98. Tokyo	4	2	11	1	2	1
99. Tunis	60	70	84	27	21	21
100. Valletta	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Total	8,308	10,467	14,114	2,247	1,718	3,980

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[1] Information not yet received from posts

Overseas Territories

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of Stâte for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on transport to and from *(a)* Pitcairn Island, *(b)* Norfolk Island, *(c)* St. Helena, *(d)* Ascension and *(e)* Tristan da Cunha. [160668]

Mr. Battle: Pitcairn has no air services nor a regular shipping service; however cargo vessels transiting between New Zealand and the Panama Canal are used to transport passengers and freight to and from Pitcairn. A passenger and cargo shipping service operates between the UK and St. Helena, calling at Ascension Island on a regular basis and Tristan da Cunha once a year. Tristan is also served by non-regular visits by research and fishing vessels. There is an American-run military airfield on Ascension Island, through which the RAF operates regular flights to and from the Falklands.

Norfolk Island is Australian territory and we do not have the information sought.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the population is of *(a)* Pitcairn Island, *(b)* Norfolk Island, *(c)* St. Helena, *(d)* Ascension and *(e)* Tristan da Cunha; and how the population of these islands has changed since 1971. [160667]

Mr. Battle: The current population of Pitcairn is 44 (74 in 1976, the nearest date to 1971 for which there are reliable figures); St. Helena is 5,016 (5,147 in 1976); Ascension is 974 (1,311 in 1971); and Tristan da Cunha is 287 (312 in 1971). Norfolk Island is Australian territory and we do not hold these statistics.

HEALTH

Departmental Policies (Cannock Chase)

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Cannock Chase constituency, the effects on Cannock Chase of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158066]

Yvette Cooper: Detailed information on the impact of Department of Health policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 and Main Estimates 2001–02" is available in the House of Commons Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

The impact of policies is not examined by constituency, and statistics collected centrally by the Department are not collected on a constituency basis.

My hon. Friend's constituency falls within the geographical area covered by South Staffordshire health authority and Staffordshire social services authority.

Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02 for South Staffordshire health authority are set out in the table.

Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02

	Increase
£ million (cash)	95.9
£ million (real terms)	59.2
Percentage (cash)	35.89
Percentage (real terms)	20.40

Note:

Increases for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. Those for previous years cover hospital and community health services only.

South Staffordshire health authority has also received additional funding for certain policies. This includes: £1.2 million for accident and emergency modernisation (£0.82 million for Burton Hospitals NHS Trust and £0.38 million for Mid Staffordshire General Hospitals NHS Trust); £74,000, £163,000, £217,000 and £175,000 for improving cancer services (breast, colorectal, lung and cancer out-patients) in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively; South Staffordshire health authority has also received £0.17 million investment for cancer equipment; £5.68 million to deliver improvement in in-patient waiting lists and out-patient waiting times; £0.77 million for Booked Admissions Projects; £0.41 million for Action on Cataracts Project; £2.20 million to expand critical care services in 2000–01; £0.79 million for winter pressures in 2000–01; £0.13 million for heart disease services 2000–01; £0.11 million for four Investing in Dentistry projects plus £50,000 Dental Care Development Fund award.

Staffordshire local authority's personal social services standard spending assessment for 2001–02 compared with 1996–97 is set out in the table.

		Percentage increase	
	£ million	*Real*	*Cash*
1996–97	120.2	—	—
2001–02	113.8	–16.1	–5.3

Note:

On 1 April 1997 Staffordshire local authority was reorganised and Stoke-on-Trent local authority came into existence (i.e. the figures in the table for 1996–97 relate to one local authority (Staffordshire local authority) serving a larger area and population than it now serves. That same area is now served by two local authorities (Staffordshire local authority and Stoke-on-Trent local authority), who each receive a standard spending assessment based on their smaller than previous populations). Therefore, figures for 2001–02 are not directly comparable with 1996–97.

In addition to the SSAs referred to, Staffordshire local authority received additional funding in the form of a number of special and specific grants as set out in the table.

£000

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Special Transitional Grant[1]	4,779	—	—	—
Partnership grant[2]	—	3,437	2,952	4,066
Prevention grant[2]	—	266	401	
Carers grant[3]	—	269	635	887
Children's grant[3]	—	675	1,059	2,681
Mental Health Core grant	675	11,884	1,319	[4]1,607
Training Support Grant	467	504	519	[4]494

[1] The special transitional grant ended in 1998–99

[2] The partnership and prevention grants have been combined in 2001–02 and called the promoting independence grants

[3] The carers' and children's grants were introduced in 1999–2000

[4] Indicative allocation

Departmental Policies (Sandwell)

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Health Authority, the effects of his Department's policies and actions on health provision in the Sandwell district health authority since 2 May 1997. [158331]

Yvette Cooper: Detailed information on the impact of Department of Health policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports. A copy of the most recent report, "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 and Main Estimates 2001–02", is available in the House of Commons Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

Increases in allocations between 1997–97 and 2001–02 for Sandwell health authority are set out in the table.

Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02

	Increase
£ million (cash)	65.1
£ million (real terms)	42.0
Percentage (cash)	39.19
Percentage (real terms)	23.33

Note:

Increases for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. Those for previous years cover hospital and community health services only.

Sandwell health authority has also received additional funding for certain policies. This includes: £0.79 million for accident and emergency modernisation (Sandwell general hospital) plus £1.4 million invested to build a medical assessment unit; £80,000, £137,000, £153,000 and £158,000 for improving cancer services (breast, colorectal and lung and cancer outpatient) in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–00 and 2000–01 respectively; Sandwell Health Authority has also received £0.15 million for investment in cancer equipment. £3.58 million to deliver improvements in in-patient waiting lists and out-patient waiting times; £0.38 million for booked admissions projects; £0.12 million for action on cataracts project; £1.25 million to expand critical care services in 2000–01; £0.38 million for winter pressures in 2000–01; £0.16 million for heart disease services 2000–01.

In addition, Sandwell health action zone has received funding of £2.8 million (2000–01) and £2.7 million (2001–02) pending further funding announcements.

Departmental Policies (Plymouth)

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency and *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on (i) the South-West Devon health authority area and (ii) Plymouth unitary authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158033]

Ms Stuart: Detailed information on the impact of Department of Health policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2001/02–2003/04 and Main Estimates 2001–02" is available in the Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

The impact of policies are not examined by constituency, and statistics collected centrally by the Department are not collected on a constituency basis.

My hon. Friend's constituency falls within the geographical area covered by South and West Devon health authority and Plymouth social services authority.

Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02 for South and West Devon health authority are set out in the table.

Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02

	Increase
£ million (cash)	117.3
£ million (real terms)	55.2
Percentage (cash)	30.12
Percentage (real terms)	16.32

Note:

Increases for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. Those for previous years cover hospital and community health services only.

South and West Devon health authority has also received additional funding for certain policies. This includes: £1.181 million for accident and emergency modernisation in 2000–01; £221,000, £265,000, £376,000 and £237,000 for improving cancer services (breast, colorectal, lung and cancer out-patients) in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively; South and West Devon health authority has also received £980,000 for investment in cancer equipment; £2.065 million and £5.026 million to reduce waiting lists and times in 2000–01 and 2001–02 respectively; £1.714 million to expand critical care services in 2000–01; £2.691 million to deal with winter pressures in 2000–01. £206,000 of this went to Plymouth social services; £1.813 million and £451,000 for developing intermediate care services in 2000–01 and 2001–02 respectively; £933,000 and £1.2 million for heart disease services in 2000–01 and 2001–02 respectively; £95,000 invested into dentistry in 2000/01

In addition, my hon. Friend's constituents will benefit from the new £101 million major hospital development that is being developed at Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust.

Plymouth local authority came into existence on 1 April 1998. Its personal social services standard spending assessment for 2001–02 is £45.960 million.

In addition to its SSA, Plymouth has received additional funding in the form of a number of special and specific grants as set out in the table.

£000

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Special Transitional Grant[1]	1,729	—	—	—
Partnership Grant[2]	—	1,256	1,077	1,471
Prevention Grant[2]	—	99	149	
Carers Grant[3]	—	99	256	357
Children's Grant[3]	—	439	696	1,679
MH Core Grant	249	433	505	[4]622
Training Support Grant	152	235	248	[4]225

[1] The special transitional grant ended in 1998–99.

[2] The partnership and prevention grants have been combined in 2001–02 and called the promoting independence grant.

[3] The carers' and children's grants were introduced in 1999–2000.

[4] Indicative allocation.

Meat Hygiene Inspections

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many meat inspectors have been employed in inspecting *(a)* domestic abattoirs and *(b)* meat entering the UK in each of the last 10 years. [155290]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer sent 23 March 2001]:* I am advised on food safety issues by the Food Standards Agency.

The Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) was established in 1995 when it took over meat inspection duties in licensed fresh meat premises in Great Britain from some 300 local authorities. The number of meat inspectors employed by the local authorities prior to 1 April 1995 is not known.

In licensed abattoirs, Meat Hygiene Inspectors (MHIs) are present throughout processing and are responsible for the post mortem inspection of carcases and offal. The average number of MHIs employed by the MHS in licensed abattoirs in Great Britain in each of the last six years is shown in the table:

	Average number of MHIs
1995–96	960
1996–97	1,084
1997–98	1,173
1998–99	1,267
1999–2000	1,205
2000–01	1,174

The increase in numbers is as a result of extra inspection work associated with the enforcement of BSE controls in licensed abattoirs.

Information for Health Initiative

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress to date on the Information for Health initiative. [158572]

Ms Stuart: Information for Health focuses on the best use of information and Information Technology in improving health and health care and in supporting the delivery of patient centred care and services. It is also a partnership approach involving key stakeholders such as front line clinicians, professional and representative bodies and IT suppliers. By being inclusive, considerable approval and support has been gained for the strategy across the National Health Service.

The strategy was launched in September 1998 and it has had to flex to take into account major new initiatives flowing from the NHS plan and the e-Government agenda. These requirements are now fully reflected.

There are clear and defined national targets to ensure the implementation of a national information and IT infrastructure. Record levels of funding have been committed for investment in IT over a three-year period. Local plans produced in all health communities are monitored and analysed to ensure that investments will meet the target deliverables. Each local community consists of a host health authority, its constituent NHS trusts, general practitioners, other primary care contractors, local authority social services and voluntary sector organisations. All local plans produced last year were published on the Department's internet site.

The document "Building the Information Core: Implementing the NHS Plan" (www.doh.gov.uk/nhsexipu/strategy/update/) contains details of key targets to be achieved over the next four years, in order to meet the commitments contained in the NHS plan in relation to information systems. Other related targets around national service priorities will emerge in due course. Collectively they give the immediate Information Management and Technology priorities which Local Implementation Strategy (LIS) communities need to address to provide the NHS-wide core applications and services. These fundamental targets are listed in the table.

The targets stretch to 2005 but progress on intermediate milestones has been strong. All GPs will be connected to NHSnet by March 2001 which will speed up and improve communications for test results, appointment booking and other patient centred information flows. NHS Direct services now cover the whole population of England.

In addition to local implementation major development programmes are in place across the NHS. The National Booked Admission Programme pilots have now been running for 12 months and the Electronic Record Development and Implementation Programme (ERDIP) will provide essential lessons for national implementation of electronic patient and health records.

Progress so far has been strong and we will maintain the effort to ensure that we fully realise the opportunities now unfolding to support a patient focused and modern NHS.

Key Information Management and Technology targets

	National percentages by date				
Targets	*31 March 2001*	*31 March 2002*	*31 March 2003*	*31 March 2004*	*31 March 2005*
IMT01—Desk top access to basic e-mail, browsing and directory services for all clinical and support staff in NHS trusts	25	100	—	—	—
IMT02—Provide remaining NHS staff with access to the above	—	—	100	—	—
IMT03—Submit Address Books and produce interim centrally managed NHS Address Book	100	—	—	—	—
IMT04—Access to X500 conformant NHS Address Book directory for all connected staff	—	100	—	—	—

Key Information Management and Technology targets

Targets	National percentages by date				
	31 March 2001	*31 March 2002*	*31 March 2003*	*31 March 2004*	*31 March 2005*
IMT05—GP Practices to be computerised	98	100	—	—	—
IMT06—GP Practices with NHSnet Connection	95	100	—	—	—
IMT07—GP Practices with local area networks connected to NHSnet eg desktop access	90	100	—	—	—
IMT08—Online public information on availability of NHS services	100	—	—	—	—
IMT09—Acute electronic patient record (EPR) level 3	10	35	—	75	100
IMT10—Integrated primary and community EPR	—	—	25	50	100
IMT11—Emergency care electronic health record	—	—	—	—	100
IMT12—All bookings from GPs to out-patients or from out-patients to day-case or in-patients to be made electronically	—	—	—	—	100
IMT13—Electronic transfer of all haematology and microbiology test results	—	60	—	—	—
IMT14—Electronic transfer of all radiology reports and discharge summaries between hospital and GPs	—	—	100	—	—
IMT15—All NHS pathology laboratories to be connected to NHSnet	100	—	—	—	—
IMT16—All pathology results sent to GPs to contain NHS number	—	100	—	—	—
IMT17—All electronic communications about patients to include their NHS number verified by NHS numbers strategic tracing service	—	—	100	—	—
IMT18—Online access to national codes for GPs and consultants	100	—	—	—	—
IMT19—National NHS payroll and integrated human resources system	—	—	—	100	—
IMT20—All out-patient data set to be transmitted through NHSwide clearing service	—	100	—	—	—
IMT21—LIS update	100	—	—	—	—
IMT22—Integration of information strategies to support National Service Framework topics into LIS development within six months of the publication of the relevant strategy	—	100	—	—	—
IMT23—Application of working in partnership toolkit	—	100	—	—	—
IMT24—Production of local education, training and development strategies	100	—	—	—	—

Note:

The final analysis of the quantitative targets and qualitative scoring of all LIS against 10 critical progress markers will be completed by mid June 2001.

Renal Services

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of renal services in Bolton. [159835]

Mr. Denham: Following the further £1.248 million capital allocation in the north-west for dialysis developments in 2001–02, a proposal for a new dialysis facility at the Royal Bolton Hospital has been received in the Department. A decision based on clear criteria will be made on the allocations in the near future.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many reported food poisoning cases there were in England and Wales during the last 12 months. [160271]

Ms Stuart: For the 52 weeks ending 27 April 2001 there were 88,110 notified cases of food poisoning in England and Wales. However, this figure includes only cases who consult a doctor or who are identified during the investigation of outbreaks.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists were registered *(a)* in May 1997 and *(b)* on the latest date for which data are available; and if he will make a statement. [160366]

Mr. Denham: The number of General Dental Service principals on a health authority list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners in England is shown in the table for 31 March 1997 and 31 December 2000.

General Dental Service: number of dentists at March 1997 and December 2000—England

Date	*Principals*	*Assistants*	*Vocational dental practitioners*	*Total*
March 1997	15,301	591	495	16,387
December 2000	16,269	1,175	614	18,058

Walsgrave NHS Trust

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps were taken by the Walsgrave NHS Trust management to investigate the surgical mistake that resulted in an anvil being left in a patient's rectum; and when the patient was informed of the mistake. [159611]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer sent 03 May 2001]:* Our White Paper "A First Class Service" sets out a requirement for all organisations within the National Health Service to set up and implement a clinical governance framework, which identifies procedures to be followed when reporting and investigating clinical and untoward incidents. Such procedures should enable incidents to be investigated thoroughly in a culture of openness and reflection to ensure lessons are learnt and clinical practice improved.

In this particular case, a clinical incident report was completed on 10 December 2000. The head of nursing for theatres was asked to undertake a thorough investigation to review and revise the necessary trust theatre procedures.

As a result of the investigation, the importance of following theatre-checking procedures was reinforced to theatre managers and staff, and all theatre procedures were reviewed and amended accordingly to reflect lessons learned through this incident.

The clinical director for surgery has ensured that junior doctors involved in colorectal surgery have a clear understanding of the operating mechanisms of the stapling gun. In addition, the Trust medical director also wrote to all consultant surgeons who carry out colorectal surgery reminding them of the need to be present throughout this kind of surgery.

The consultant surgeon responsible for his care informed the patient on 18 January 2001 that the anvil had been left in his rectum following the operation of 4 December 2000. The patient's wife and another family member together with the specialist stoma nurse were present during this discussion.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total cost incurred by the Walsgrave NHS Trust since the suspension of Mr. Barros D'Sa on account of that suspension, including the suspended surgeon's salary, disciplinary hearings and related procedures and legal and court costs. [159610]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The total cost incurred by the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire National Health Service Trust in regard to this matter was £171,605 at the end of March 2001. This cost includes elements relating to the salary of the suspended consultant, costs of locum cover, the setting up of an Inquiry Panel in accordance with HC(90)9, legal and court costs and mediation meeting costs.

The National Clinical Assessment Authority will issue new guidance to NHS organisations later this year on handling suspensions and will consider any outstanding cases which are still awaiting resolution.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average peri-operative mortality rates for rectal cancer operations were in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000 for (i) England, (ii) the West Midlands and (iii) Walsgrave NHS Trust excluding the St. Cross Hospital at Rugby. [159612]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The table shows a count of discharges from hospital for patients where the main operation was on the rectum and the main diagnosis was 'malignant neoplasm of rectum'. This information is for National Health Service hospitals in England, West Midlands and the Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust in 1996–97 to 1999–2000 and includes both emergency and planned operations undertaken in this period.

	Live discharges	*Mortality*
1996–97		
Walsgrave NHS Trust	49	[1]—
West Midlands	732	32
England	5,480	228
1997–98		
Walsgrave NHS Trust	39	[1]—
West Midlands	694	32
England	5,381	250
1998–99		
Walsgrave NHS Trust	58	[1]—
West Midlands	681	32
England	5,649	241
1999–2000		
Walsgrave NHS Trust	59	[1]—
West Midlands	675	23
England	5,773	210

[1] Owing to reasons of confidentiality, figures between one and five at trust level are not normally published.

Notes:

1. The main operation is the first of four operation fields in the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data set, and is usually the most resource intensive performed during the episode.
2. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
3. Figures in this table have not been adjusted for shortfalls in data.
4. The Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust became the University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust in 2000.
5. The statistics provided are whole trust statistics and include St. Cross Hospital in Rugby for the time it has been a part of the trust.

Source:

HES Department of Health

The average peri-operative rates during the four year period 1996 to 2000 is:

	Total discharges	*Mortality*	*Rate percentage*
1996–2000			
Walsgrave NHS Trust	216	11	5.1
West Midlands	2,901	119	4.1
England	23,212	929	4.0

Note:

The average number of deaths related to rectal cancer operations at the former Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust is less than three per year.

Source:

Department of Health

Heart Attack Statistics

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the proportion of patients is who having suffered a heart attack (myocardial infarction) survive for five years; and what the equivalent figures are in *(a)* France, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* Sweden and *(d)* the USA. [160239]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Data on the number of patients who survive for five years after having a heart attack are not routinely collected. Equivalent data for international comparisons are also not readily available. We have developed the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease, a 10-year strategy which deals with all aspects of coronary heart disease to provide a modern service with fair and fast access to high-quality services. One of the NSF's immediate priorities is to improve the use of effective medicines after heart attack (especially use of aspirin, beta-blockers and statins) so that 80 to 90 per cent. of people discharged from hospital following a heart attack will be prescribed these drugs.

We recognise the importance of better information and that is why we have funded, through the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the Royal College of Physicians'

Myocardial Infarction National Audit Project (MINAP), which will collect information on all people hospitalised with a heart attack. It is expected that MINAP will eventually link to mortality data through the United Kingdom central cardiac audit database, and provide information on survival rates.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on planned spending on child and adolescent mental health services by local health authorities for the financial year 2001–02. [160638]

Mr. Hutton: Health authority spending plans to develop further their child and adolescent mental health strategies in 2001–02 have yet to be finalised. The planned health authority expenditure will reflect priorities as assessed jointly with local authorities.

The Department has provided £20 million in 2001–02 to health authorities, which is in their baseline allocations. This funding, together with £15 million allocated to local authorities, is a significant investment for the development of services for this vulnerable group of children and young people.

Heart Disease

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many echocardiography technicians were employed by the NHS for each of the last five years. [160603]

Mr. Denham: Data for the professions in health care science are not collected to this level.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recruitment and retention of cardiac technicians accredited by the British Society of Echocardiography to carry out echocardiography, within the NHS. [160604]

Mr. Denham: We are implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention for all staff, including cardiac technicians accredited by the British Society of Echocardiography to carry out echocardiography. We are investing in fair pay, encouraging the National Health Service to become a better employer, increasing training, attracting former staff back to the NHS and encouraging flexible retirement.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the British Society of Echocardiography regarding concerns about the recognition of specialised echo technicians in the NHS. [160605]

Mr. Denham: We have not received any representations.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to increase the number of dedicated echocardiography technicians in the NHS. [160606]

Mr. Denham: The Department is carrying out a review of the health care scientist work force. The need for an increase in the number of echocardiography technicians will be considered as part of the review.

Disabled Persons (Consultation, Representation and Services) Act 1986

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent in the last financial year under the provisions of the Disabled Persons (Consultation, Representation and Services) Act 1986. [160534]

Mr. Hutton: The Disabled Persons (Consultation, Representation and Services) Act 1986 forms part of the overall legislative framework for the provision of services to disabled people. As such, money spent under this Act is not separately identified, and forms part of the overall allocation for social services expenditure for disabled people of all ages.

Details of local authority social services expenditure for the last financial year are not as yet available. Our latest available figures relate to the 1999–2000 financial year, details of which can be found in the Department of Health bulletin Personal Social Services Current Expenditure in England 1999–2000.

Abattoirs

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the price of inspection for small and medium-sized abattoirs. [160645]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The Meat Inspection Charges Task Force was established by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in April 2000 to look at the issue of meat inspection charges and to consider alternative approaches to charging that would help to alleviate the burden of inspection charges on small and medium-sized abattoirs and cutting plants.

In its report, the taskforce recommended that the Government should contribute to the costs of meat inspection in Great Britain. The taskforce recommended moving away from charging for meat inspections on an hourly basis and that, instead, all abattoirs and cutting plants should be charged the lower of either the standard (headage) charges laid down in EU Directive 96/43/EEC or their actual inspection costs. The taskforce estimated that adopting this recommendation would result in a cost to Government of up to £19 million in 2001–02 and each year thereafter.

We accepted the taskforce recommendation and announced new, additional financial support in the context of the publication of the Rural White Paper on 28 November 2000 to secure the future of small and medium-sized abattoirs.

Following consultation, a new charging system based on the taskforce recommendation was introduced by the FSA on 2 April 2001. Under the new system, the majority of meat plants will be paying substantially reduced meat inspection charges.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160885]

Ms Stuart: There are currently 16 waivers signed by senior civil servants in the Department of Health. This figure includes eight waivers relating to staff in the regional offices and two waivers relating to staff of executive agencies of the Department.

This represents just under 4 per cent. of the total number of senior civil servants employed by the Department as at 1 April 2001. Although this represents only a small proportion of senior civil servants in the Department, I am determined to improve the work/life balance of staff throughout my Department and there is currently a project under way to address all such long working hours.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will accept evidence from *(a)* patient organisations *(b)* charities, *(c)* pharmaceutical companies, *(d)* individual patients and *(e)* the medical profession in the forthcoming review of the operation of NICE; and if he will make a statement; [160745]

(2) if the forthcoming results of the review of the operation of NICE will be *(a)* published and *(b)* conducted in public; and if he will make a statement; [160747]

(3) if he will refer the forthcoming review of the operation of NICE to an independent reviewing body; and if he will make a statement; [160744]

(4) if he will list the *(a)* start and *(b)* completion dates for the forthcoming review of the operation of NICE. [160746]

Mr. Denham: Decisions on the detail of this review have yet to be taken.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 6 March and 5 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Reverend Canon Professor R. Preston. [160953]

Ms Stuart: A reply to my right hon. Friend's letter was sent on 8 May 2001.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 14 February, 15 March and 19 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. S. McHugh. [160955]

Ms Stuart: A reply to my hon. Friend's letter was sent on 8 May 2001.

NHS Vacancies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 454W, on NHS vacancies, how many NHS vacancies there were in London for *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* professions allied to medicine and *(f)* management and administration staff for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; how many posts in each category have been vacant for longer than three months; and if he will make a statement. [158774]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The information requested is contained in the "Department of Health's Vacancies Survey—1999–2000", copies of which are available in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Block Grant

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the current value is of the block grant under the Barnett Formula to central Government funding for Scotland; what it was in 1997–98; and what the forecast is for 2003–04. [145199]

Mrs. Liddell: The expenditure of the former Scottish Office within Departmental Expenditure Limits in 1998–99 was £13,134 million. Expenditure in Scotland in 2001–02 (including expenditure by the Scotland Office) is planned to be £16,322 million and the corresponding figure for 2003–04 is £18,547 million. Following the introduction of resource budgeting, figures on a consistent basis for years prior to 1998–99 are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many job losses there were in Scotland, broken down by the lowest regional level for which data are available, for each of the last five years. [145647]

Mrs. Liddell: Figures on job losses are not held centrally. However, figures on employment for Scotland by unitary authority (the lowest regional level for which data are available) are produced by the ONS as part of the Labour Force Survey.

Total employment—Scottish unitary authorities, 1996–2000

Thousand

Area Name	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Scotland	2,260	2,284	2,309	2,297	2,331
Aberdeen City	115	109	111	123	110
Aberdeenshire	110	115	107	115	119
Angus	57	59	49	52	56
Argyll and Bute	42	40	44	38	37
Clackmannanshire	15	16	23	19	18
Dumfries and Galloway	68	63	63	67	65
Dundee City	60	65	65	61	57
East Ayrshire	54	43	46	43	48
East Dunbartonshire	51	53	53	55	54
East Lothian	39	41	44	48	42
East Renfrewshire	43	44	43	43	41
Edinburgh, City of	207	206	215	223	222
Eilean Siar	15	16	11	11	[1]—
Falkirk	67	62	70	66	73
Fife	150	156	162	155	160
Glasgow City	208	215	220	207	225
Highland	92	101	98	93	98
Inverclyde	39	39	34	40	37
Midlothian	38	39	43	37	42
Moray	45	39	40	45	42
North Ayrshire	58	56	59	53	63
North Lanarkshire	128	131	139	141	133
Orkney Islands	[1]—	12	10	13	15
Perthshire and Kinross	64	67	62	57	64
Renfrewshire	77	90	81	85	89
Scottish Borders	48	51	49	50	54
Shetland Islands	10	11	12	12	[1]—
South Ayrshire	46	52	60	48	47

Total employment—Scottish unitary authorities, 1996–2000

Thousand

Area Name	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
South Lanarkshire	147	136	141	150	142
Stirling	42	33	34	36	32
West Dunbartonshire	36	42	42	35	44
West Lothian	81	83	80	76	82

[1] Spring of each year, refers to UAs with less than 10,000 employed in a particular year, where the survey is not reliable.

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Labour Force Survey

Employment

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will provide a breakdown by industry of the jobs created in Scotland between 1 May 1997 and 1 July 1999. [145887]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 16 January 2001]:* Exact figures on job creation are not held centrally. However figures on employee jobs by sector (the lowest level of aggregation available for Scotland) are collected by the ONS on a quarterly basis. For the dates specified, the closest match is the June quarter. These figures do not include the self-employed.

Employee jobs by sector, Scotland

Thousand

	June		
	1997	*1998*	*1999*
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	35.8	32.4	38.6
Mining and Quarrying Industries	24.9	27.2	26.0
Manufacturing	320.0	315.9	301.4
Electricity Gas and Water Supply	16.0	16.7	17.8
Construction	111.1	117.5	111.4
Retail and Wholesale	324.1	316.4	312.5
Hotels and Catering	120.2	131.8	127.7
Transport Storage and Communication	104.6	106.5	113.6
Financial Services	79.3	77.6	82.0
Real Estate and Business Services	206.6	221.0	229.4
Public Administration	126.1	115.0	148.1
Education	155.8	152.6	155.0
Health and Social Work	272.1	263.2	261.6
Other services	92.4	98.4	96.7
Total	1,989.1	1,992.5	2,021.7

Note:

Columns may not add up, owing to rounding

Source:

ONS Employer Surveys

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many jobs were lost in Scotland in each year between 1 May 1997 and 1 July 1999, broken down by *(a)* sector and *(b)* industry. [145889]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 16 January 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer above, columns 368-69W. Figures are not held centrally for jobs lost.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the number of asylum seekers and refugees placed in Scotland under the dispersal scheme. [145888]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 16 January 2001]:* Glasgow City is currently the only local authority in Scotland providing services for asylum claimants under the dispersal scheme implemented by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. At 30 March it was accommodating 1,301 principal asylum seekers (3,903 individuals) under these arrangements.

The YMCA in Glasgow is also contracted to provide services under the dispersal scheme and at 30 March it was providing accommodation for 186 single asylum seekers.

Press Releases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press releases were issued by his Department in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; how many have been issued in the current financial year; and what his estimate is of the total number for the current financial year. [149240]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The former Scottish Office issued 1,968 press releases in 1996–97; 2,162 in 1997–98 and 2,451 in 1998–99.

The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. In 1999–2000 the Department issued 174 press releases and 372 in 2000–01.

Public Relations (Expenditure)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in her Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000, and what the planned expenditure and breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149262]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* Expenditure by the former Scottish Office was as follows:

£

	Press advertising	*TV*	*Radio*	*Direct mail*
1996–97	981,335	1,160,447	444,957	—
1997–98	526,206	814,874	221,021	63,473
1998–99	1,058,573	2,371,073	393,701	89,080
1999 April-June	286,323	378,719	1,681	—

The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The Department has carried out one advertising campaign on electoral registration. Expenditure was as follows:

2000–01

	£
Press advertising	154,758
TV	163,073
Radio	—
Direct mail	—

Ministerial Visits

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many official representations abroad were made by Ministers in his Department in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; which countries were visited; in which capacity each visit was undertaken; and what was the cost of each visit. [150059]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since then Scotland Office Ministers have made a number of visits abroad for a variety of official purposes. The Secretary of State made visits to Spain and Italy and the Minister of State made visits to

Azerbaijan
Belgium
Canada
Cuba
Egypt
France
Germany
Italy
Ireland
Japan/Manila
Mexico
Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
Sweden
Thailand
Vietnam.

The Minister of State's overseas visits were to promote Scottish trade or wider Scottish and UK interests. The total cost of ministerial overseas travel in 1999–2000 was £11,198 and £29,183 in 2000–01.

The information for earlier years is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many official trade representations abroad Scotland Office Ministers have made in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; and which countries were visited. [150036]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. In 1999–2000 the Minister of State, who had trade responsibilities within the Department, made trade-related visits to France, Belgium, Italy, Egypt and the Far East (Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam). In 2000–01 the Minister made visits to Belgium; Azerbaijan; Germany; Sweden; Slovenia; Canada; Cuba; Italy and Japan.

Departmental Running Costs

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate she has made for the staffing levels and running costs for the Scotland Office in the years 2000–01 and 2001–02. [150045]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* Details of the staffing levels and running costs for the period to 2003–04 were set out in the Scotland Office Departmental Report 2001, which was published on 30 March 2001.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the running costs of the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland and Advocate-General for Scotland were in each year since 1999–2000; how much of the budget in each year was allocated to *(a)* staff costs, *(b)* maintenance, *(c)* travel costs and *(d)* other expenditure; and if he will make a statement. [152351]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 7 March 2001]:* Information in the form requested is not available. Details of administration costs were set out in the Scotland Office Departmental Report 2001, which was published on 30 March 2001 and in the Department's annual accounts.

In 1999–2000 expenditure on Scotland Office staff was £1,976,000 and on other administration costs was £1,991,000. Comparable figures for 2000–01 are not yet available.

Expenditure

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate she has made of the total sums projected to be spent in Scotland in *(a)* this financial year and *(b)* each of the next two financial years (i) by the Scottish Executive and (ii) through direct spending by the Government of the UK. [152090]

Mrs. Liddell: Details of expenditure by the Scottish Executive were set out in "The Scottish Budget: Annual Expenditure Report" published by the Executive on 30 March 2001. Expenditure for 2000–01 was £17,997 million and is planned to be £19,823 million in 2001–02 and £21,022 million in 2002–03.

Details of other direct spending by the UK Government in Scotland are not calculated for forward years. Information on public expenditure by country and function is published by the Treasury each year in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses.

Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much certified timber has been purchased by her Department over the past six months; and what proportion of total timber purchases this represents. [152108]

Mrs. Liddell: No timber has been purchased by my Department over the past six months.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department's annual report on timber procurement to the Committee of Green Ministers will be published. [152149]

Mrs. Liddell: An annual report will be provided in line with the answer given on 28 July 2000, *Official Report,* columns 947–48W, by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment.

New Deal

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will estimate the number of Scots on benefits who have found employment under the New Deal scheme. [153128]

Mrs. Liddell: The New Deal has been a resounding success in Scotland with over 48,000 people going into jobs as a result of their participation in the New Deal for Young People, New Deal 25+, New Deal for Lone Parents and New Deal 50 plus.

A/F Protein Inc.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if her Office's *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials met, prior to devolution, representatives of A/F Protein Inc. of Waltham, Massachusetts, United States of America. [157766]

Mrs. Liddell: There is no record of Scottish Office Ministers or officials having met representatives of A/F Protein Inc. prior to devolution.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations her Office's *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials received, prior to devolution, from representatives of A/F Protein Inc. of Waltham, Massachusetts, United States of America; and what response she made. [157767]

Mrs. Liddell: No such representations were received by either Scottish Office Ministers or officials prior to devolution.

GM Food (Research)

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the projects funded by the Scottish Office from 1990 to devolution on scientific research into *(a)* genetically modified and *(b)* transgenic fish in the UK and abroad, by research project title, indicating the purpose of the research, the project timespan, its total cost and recipient research centres. [157765]

Mrs. Liddell: No scientific projects on genetically modified or transgenic fish have been directly funded by the Scottish Office since 1990.

Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions between 5 June 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158544]

Mrs. Liddell: No special advisers from my Department have travelled abroad in an official capacity.

Appointments (Age Limits)

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in her Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158126]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies.

In respect of the Boundary Commission for Scotland, the only public body for which I am responsible, there was no specific age limit for applications in the last round of appointments for membership, in 1998.

Irish Visit

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Irish Government departments the Permanent Under-Secretary of State met during his visit of 10–11 February 1999. [159796]

Mrs. Liddell: The Permanent Under-Secretary of State met officials from the Department of An Taoiseach, the Clerk of the Dail, and the Department of Foreign Affairs during his visit to Dublin of 10–11 February 1999.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total cost was of employing special advisers in her Department and its predecessor from 1997 to date. [160050]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Perth (Ms Cunningham) on 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 425W.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many special advisers worked in her Department and its predecessor from 1997 to date. [160035]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* In the Scottish Office in 1997–98 there were two special advisers and during 1998–99 there were three special advisers in post at any given time.

The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. In 1999–2000 and 2000–01 there were three special advisers in post at any one time, one of whom was unpaid. There are currently two special advisers.

Employment Service

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what target levels have been set for the aims and objectives of the Employment Service in Scotland in operational year 2001–02. [161065]

Mrs. Liddell: The aim of the Employment Service is to help people without jobs find work and employers to fill their vacancies. The Employment Service in Scotland makes an important contribution to an efficient and flexible labour market and to delivering the Government's welfare to work policies, working in close partnership with employers and others. These targets pave the way for the new agency, Jobcentre Plus, whose pathfinder offices will begin work in October. They give stronger emphasis than ever before to helping individuals facing particular difficulty in the labour market to move from unemployment and economic inactivity into sustainable employment. The highest priority will be given to helping people who have been economically inactive for long periods, including lone parents, to find work, and to capitalise on the opportunities created by the new generation of New Deals.

I am announcing today the targets we have set for Scotland. They are challenging and stretching. We are looking for improved levels of customer service to jobseekers and employers, together with consolidation of the improved performance against the Jobseeker's Allowance Labour Market Activity target. These targets cover a full year, but we propose to carry out a comprehensive consultation and review later in the year that will inform the setting of targets for the new agency for people of working age, called Jobcentre Plus, for 2002–03.

The targets for the Employment Service in Scotland for 2001–02 are:

Vision and Purpose

The Employment Service in Scotland aims to make a major contribution to an efficient and flexible labour market and to the Government's objectives of an increase in the effective supply of labour, and countering poverty and social exclusion by helping welfare recipients facing the most severe disadvantages to compete effectively for jobs. It does this by working closely with employers and with its private, voluntary and public sector partners to provide a quality service for all people without a job and to promote employment opportunities for all who can work. It aims to attract a diverse range of vacancies and to fill those vacancies quickly by matching the right people and skills with the right jobs. Its chief priority is to help individuals facing particular difficulty in the labour market to move from welfare and economic inactivity into sustainable employment. It does this through correct application of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime, delivery of the New Deals, and the provision of appropriate information, advice, training and support. The challenge and opportunity for the Employment Service, is to sustain continuous improvement in its services to jobseekers and employers and to make these services more accessible and relevant to customer needs, through effective use of modern technology and close working with a wide range of partners.

Aim

To help people without jobs find work and employers to fill their vacancies.

Objectives and Targets

Objective A

To help all people without jobs, and particularly those on welfare and at a disadvantage in the labour market, to find and keep work by providing appropriate information, advice, training and support and by encouraging employers to open more opportunities to them.

Targets

A1: To help into work 7,214 people who are either jobless lone parents, participants in the New Deal for Partners, participants in the New Deal for Disabled People or other disabled people claiming 'inactive' benefits.

A2: To help into work 46,517 participants in the JSA New Deals, New Deal 50+, Employment Zones, other disabled people not recorded in A1, and others at a particular disadvantage.

A3: To help into work 90,202 welfare recipients and other disadvantaged people.

A4: To help into work 150,788 jobless people.

A5: For 75 per cent. of long-term JSA claimants to be off benefit 13 weeks after starting a job into which they were placed by the Employment Service.

Objective B

To ensure that the rights and relevant labour market responsibilities of people on JSA and other benefits are fulfilled, while helping to combat fraud and abuse of the benefit system.

Target

B1: To ensure that the relevant labour market responsibilities of people on JSA are fulfilled in 91 per cent. of cases checked.

Objective C

To harness new technology, the pursuit of excellence and continuous improvement to deliver effective, efficient and accessible services to all people without jobs and to employers in Jobcentres and increasingly through other locations and means of communications.

Targets

C1: To achieve a 93 per cent. customer service level for jobseekers.

C2: To achieve an 83 per cent. customer service level for employers.

Objective D

To deliver services to all ES customers in a way which respects individual differences, helps to overcome disadvantages due to ethnicity, gender, age or disability and achieves the best possible outcome for each of them.

Targets

D1: From October: To achieve a proportion of new ethnic minority claimants who leave JSA for a job within 12 months, which is equal to the percentage of all white claimants leaving JSA for a job within 12 months (to work towards equality of outcomes by 2004.) (Target level to be announced.

D2: From October: To screen benefit claimants for basic skills requirement and where needed refer to appropriate training. (Exact target wording and level to be announced.)

Milestone Target

By 30 September 2001, for 95 per cent. of jobseekers claiming JSA to have been asked to identify their ethnicity and for this answer to be recorded.

Employment (Glasgow)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment in (i) the constituency of Glasgow, Pollok and (ii) Glasgow (1) in 1997 and (2) the latest date for which figures are available: and what the percentage change was in each case. [160923]

Mrs. Liddell: The table shows the number of people who were in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment in (i) the constituency of Glasgow, Pollok and (ii) Glasgow City in September 1997 and December 1999 respectively; and what the percentage change was in each case.

Employee jobs 1997 and 1999—Glasgow, Pollok parliamentary constituency and Glasgow City unitary authority

	1997	1999	Change (Percentage)
Glasgow Pollok			
Full-time	8,900	9,600	7.9
Part-time	4,100	4,100	0.0
Glasgow City			
Full-time	236,200	249,000	5.4
Part-time	90,500	93,700	3.5

Source:

Annual Business Inquiry, Office for National Statistics

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 11 May 2001

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much radioactive nuclear waste was *(a)* pumped and *(b)* dumped into the Irish Sea in (i) 1970 to 1979, (ii) 1980 to 1989, (iii) 1990 to 1999 and (iv) 2000 to date. [143160]

Mr. Meacher: Annual discharge data for the years 1970 to 1994, for nuclear sites in the UK, are contained in Government reports on radioactivity in the marine environment as follows:

Radiobiological Laboratory Technical Report, Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles, MAFF. Annual publication, 1966–1976.

Aquatic Environment Monitoring Report, Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles, MAFF. Annual publication, 1977–1994.

I am arranging for copies of these reports to be placed in the Libraries of the House. Data for the years 1995 to 1999 are contained in the annual publication "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment", copies of which are in the House of Commons Library. Data for 2000 will be published in due course.

I am commissioning work to be done on collating this information in the form requested.

The UK ceased all sea dumping of radioactive waste from 1982. The issue of dumping of radioactive waste in Beaufort's Dyke and other parts of the Irish Sea prior to that date was addressed by the then Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), in his answers of 1 July 1997, *Official Report,* columns 158–60W, 30 July 1997, *Official Report,* columns 322–24W, and 24 November 1997, *Official Report,* columns 409–10W.

Landfill

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Government will make use of the provision in Article 5 of the EU directive on the landfill of waste of April 1999 allowing the postponement of the attainment of the targets set out in that Article for the diversion of waste from landfill. [156821]

Mr. Meacher: The Government announced in Waste Strategy 2000, published in May 2000, that they proposed to make use of the full four-year derogations allowed under Article 5 of the EU Directive on the landfill of waste.

Radioactivity (North-West Coast)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports he has assessed of radioactivity ratings of silt and mud produced by sand winning plant screening processes on the north-west coast of England. [157153]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency routinely monitors the coastline of north-west England for radionuclides and the results are published in its annual "Radioactivity in the Environment" report.

In addition, an ad hoc assessment programme was initiated at the end of 1998 to assess the radiation levels in the lagoons that receive the waste washings from the sand winning process at Southport. Samples of sediments were taken from the lagoons in 1998 and 1999 and analysed for radionuclides and the results were reported back to the Environment Agency. The reported levels for the two most significant radionuclides present in the sediment, caesium-137 and americium-241, were as follows:

caesium-137 ranged from 60.5 to 1510 Bq/kg with a mean value of 585 Bq/kg;

americium-241 ranged from 19.7 to 394 Bq/kg with a mean value of 180 Bq/kg.

The Environment Agency undertook an initial radiological assessment based on these levels. They used Generalised Derived Limits (GDLs) for marine sediments, published by NRPB as a yardstick. GDLs are levels of radioactivity which, using pessimistic exposure assumptions, would result in a dose of 1 milliSievert per year.

Using pessimistic exposure assumptions, and taking account of direct external exposure, inadvertent ingestion, and inhalation of re-suspended particulate (i.e. dried sand and mud being blown by the wind), these mean values would lead to a maximum dose of respectively 12 per cent. and 0.2 per cent. of the 1 milliSievert per year dose limit for the general public.

The radioactivity levels in the sediment were not considered high enough to warrant a full radiological risk assessment, and detailed assessment of the effects of ingestion/inhalation over time has not been carried out. These results are consistent with the Agency's routine coastal monitoring programme. I understand that no further monitoring of the lagoons has been undertaken.

Euratom

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the United Kingdom has made a submission to Euratom, pursuant to *(a)* Article 34 and *(b)* Article 35 of the Euratom Treaty since the United Kingdom joined the European Community. [158426]

Mr. Meacher: Under Article 34 of the Euratom Treaty, any member state in whose territories particularly dangerous experiments are to take place is required to take additional health and safety measures, and in advance to obtain the opinion on the European Commission. The assent of the Commission is required where the effects of such experiments are liable to affect the territories of other member states. No such submissions have been made by the United Kingdom.

Under Article 35 of the Treaty the European Commission has the right of access to certain facilities. The Article does not require submissions to be made to the Commission.

Roads (Debris)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how much has been spent by his Department on removing litter and debris from the side of the A1 in each of the last four years; [159195]

(2) how much was spent by his Department in each of the last four years on removing litter and debris from the side of motorways and roads for which his Department is responsible. [159196]

Mr. Prescott: Responsibility for removing litter and debris from the motorway network in England rests with the Highways Agency which employs a number of maintenance contractors to carry out the work. Because these contractors carry out this task together with other routine maintenance work, it is not possible to disaggregate the cost of litter collection from the total cost of maintenance.

The responsibility for litter collection on the all purpose trunk road network rests with district and borough councils and the information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

London Underground

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what commitments he has made to the on-going financing of the first seven years of the London Underground public-private partnership. [159794]

Mr. Hill: The financial requirements of London Underground under the public-private partnership will not finally be known until negotiations with preferred bidders have been completed. The PPP is about obtaining best value in the way that farebox revenue and any public subsidy is spent. The Government have made it clear that, as long as it proves value for money to do so, then Transport for London will receive the appropriate level of central government grant to allow for London Underground's need to make payments to the PPP contractors.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date; [160032]

(2) what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160049]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Since 3 May 1997 this Department has generally employed three full-time and two part-time special advisers at any one time, except for a period of nine months in 1997 and 1998 when there were four full-time and two part-time special advisers. In 1997 under the previous Administration there were three full-time and two part-time special advisers in the Departments of the Environment and Transport.

The total cost of employing special advisers in the four financial years 1997–98 to 2000–2001 was £642,000.

Urban II Programme

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the EU's Urban II Programme; what delays have taken place to implementation of the EU's Urban II Programme; and what the reasons are for such delays. [160105]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* We will shortly be submitting the English programmes for Bristol; Burnley; Halifax in Calderdale; Hetton and Murton; Normanton, Derby; Peterborough; Stockwell and Thames Gateway to the European Commission.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to answer the letter transferred to him by the Chancellor of the Exchequer dated 6 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. T. Perkins. [160926]

Mr. Meacher: I replied to my right hon. Friend yesterday.

Smoking (Workplaces)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the methodology of the work conducted by M. Cremieux in Canada on the economic impact of the introduction of controls on smoking in workplaces. [160880]

Mr. Meacher: None, but HSE is aware of Canadian studies, including this recent research by Pierre-Yves Cremieux and Pierre Oullette and will take this into account in future policy development.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the process for claiming rate relief for those businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. [160860]

Mr. Meacher: Businesses should direct applications for hardship relief to their local authority who have discretionary powers to grant rate relief of up to 100 per cent. to any ratepayer who is suffering hardship, for whatever reason, provided it is in the interest of the wider local community to do so. We have extended the central Government contribution to the cost of this relief from 75 per cent. to 95 per cent. in cases where the business is seriously affected by foot and mouth disease, is located in one of the 151 eligible rural districts and has a rateable value of £12,000 or less.

Full details of the arrangements for providing this relief were set out in Special Grant Report No. 80, which was approved by Parliament on 2 April 2001.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he is giving to local authorities on how they should approach *(a)* businesses that apply for rateable value revaluations and *(b)* businesses that apply for hardship relief in relation to foot and mouth disease. [160861]

Mr. Meacher: Rating lists are compiled and maintained by the Valuation Office Agency and proposals to alter values shown in the rating list must be made to the local valuation officer.

Local authorities have discretionary powers to grant rate relief of up to 100 per cent. to any ratepayer who is suffering hardship, for whatever reason, provided it is in the interest of the wider local community to do so. We have extended the central Government contribution to the cost of this relief from 75 per cent. to 95 per cent. in cases where the business is seriously affected by foot and mouth disease, is located in one of the 151 eligible rural districts and has a rateable value of £12,000 or less. Full details of the arrangements for providing this relief were set out in Special Grant Report No. 80, which was approved by Parliament on 2 April 2001.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) for what reason liquid animal waste from animal carcases was dumped in the Irish sea in the period 1 February to 30 April as a result of the foot and mouth disease outbreak; and if he will make a statement; [161045]

(2) what the *(a)* geographical origin and *(b)* volume is of the liquid waste from animal carcases which has been dumped in the Irish sea as a result of the foot and mouth disease outbreak; [161044]

(3) what action he is taking to prevent the further dumping of liquid waste from animal carcases into the Irish sea; and if he will make a statement; [161046]

Mr. Meacher: The waste effluent in question has arisen from two sources, the Great Orton mass burial site in Cumbria and the Birkshaw mass burial site, near Lockerbie in Dumfriesshire. The waste effluent consists of the natural breakdown products which occur as the carcases decompose, primarily blood, fats, grease etc.

Both the mass disposal sites in question are operated on the "containment principle". As a result, it is an essential part of the site operation that effluents are removed from the disposal cells in order to prevent pollution of local surface and groundwaters, and to be treated at appropriate facilities.

In the case of the Great Orton waste effluent, it is removed from the disposal cells and is then treated on site by means of ph adjustment to ensure that no active foot and mouth virus remains before being sent to Workington Wastewater Treatment Works (WTW). Like abattoir waste, this effluent is a readily biodegradable material and as such ideal for treatment at the WTW facilities. On discharge to the WTW it receives a dilution equivalent to 1 in 400 with the sewage already at the works for treatment. At the point of the consented discharge from the WTW to the Irish Sea, via a long sea outfall, it is estimated that a further dilution rate of 1 in 10,000 occurs and a dilution rate of 1 in 100,000 upon reaching the coastline. At this point that would equate to a total dilution rate of 1 in 40 million. This represents zero impact on human health.

The criteria for selection of Workington WTW as the appropriate facility to receive this waste were as follows:

The rate of effluent production.

The available facilities capable of receiving such material.

The proximity of such facilities to the site of production.

The most practicable environmental solution given the nature of the foot and mouth crisis.

As a consequence and following discussion between MAFF, Environment Agency and United Utilities the Workington facility was identified as the best practicable environmental option in the circumstances.

The Environment Agency has made it clear to both MAFF, who operate the Great Orton site, and to United Utilities, who operate the Workington WTW, that the use of this works as a means of effluent disposal could only be considered as a short-term disposal option. In the medium to long term more sophisticated and robust treatment facilities must be developed on the Great Orton site in order to pre-treat the effluents and reduce their biological strength before they leave the site. This combined with the natural reduction in effluent strength as the rate of decomposition slows in the site will greatly increase the available range of off-site treatment options as an alternative to discharging to the Irish Sea.

Removal of effluent from Great Orton to Workington WTW began on 6 April 2001. As of the 9 May 2001, 8,900 cubic metres of effluent had been removed to Workington WTW.

Effluent from the Birkshaw mass burial site in Dumfriesshire is removed from the site for the same reasons as at Great Orton. It is also subject to the same virus control measures which ensures that no active virus leaves the site. In this case the effluent is taken to a licensed waste management facility near Workington, operated by ALCO Waste Management Ltd. The site is licensed to receive such wastes under the terms of its waste management licence conditions. The effluent is deposited into the landfill site where the natural biological processes taking place within the site begin the treatment of the effluent. All effluents from the site are then subject to further treatment, in the site's purpose built effluent treatment facility, before being discharged to foul sewer under and in accordance with the terms of a trade effluent consent issued by United Utilities.

The site began receiving effluent on the 18 April 2001. To date, 5,000 cubic metres have been received.

The Environment Agency has undertaken monitoring of the effluents, sampling at the marine outfalls, carried out coastal surveys and arranged for aerial photographs to be taken of the discharges. To date, no environmental impact has been obser[illegible] but the position will be kept under observation.

Light Duty Vehicles

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will summarise the results of the study commissioned by his

Department into the track and environmental costs of cars and light duty vehicles; and when he will publish the full report. [160932]

Mr. Hill: The Department expects the contractors to complete their research report by July 2001. It is expected that the report will then be published.

Central Railway

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the review of the Central Railway proposal which he has requested from the SRA will include an appraisal of the financial viability of the project. [161054]

Mr. Hill: Yes.

Road Safety Units

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in respect of the future of road safety units. [161098]

Mr. Hill: It is for local authorities to decide how to deliver their local casualty reduction targets. However, well resourced road safety units can provide an important focus to this work, helping to ensure that targets are achieved. It is vital that local authorities keep to their targets to ensure delivery of the national targets to be achieved by 2010.

A44 (Worcester to Kington)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans there are to improve the A44 road between Worcester and Kington in Herefordshire. [161066]

Mr. Hill: The A44 between Worcester and Kington is the responsibility of Worcestershire county council and Herefordshire council as local highway authorities.

Herefordshire council's Local Transport Plan includes some safety improvements in Bromyard. The council is also in the early stages of considering the need for a bypass for Pembridge. If they conclude there is a need they will be able to bid for funds in their next Local Transport Plan submission.

Worcestershire county council has no plans for improvements on their section of the route.

Road Accidents

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many deaths and serious injuries there were in road accidents in each constituency in Great Britain in 1999. [161021]

Mr. Hill: The information is not available in the form requested. Data for metropolitan areas and unitary authorities and counties are given in the table.

Numbers of killed and seriously injured casualties in 1999

Metropolitan areas/ Unitary Authority (UA)/County	*Killed*	*Seriously injured*
Greater London	264	5,697
Greater Manchester	89	1,035
Merseyside	55	633
South Yorkshire	50	683
Tyne and Wear	37	479
West Midlands	89	1,664
West Yorkshire	111	1,189
Bath and North East Somerset UA	7	93
City of Bristol UA	8	180
North Somerset UA	14	86
South Gloucestershire UA	12	136
Bedfordshire[1]	46	263
Luton UA	3	83
Bracknell Forest UA	3	62
West Berkshire UA	16	162
Reading UA	4	64
Slough UA	5	56
Windsor and Maidenhead UA	13	76
Wokingham UA	7	63
Buckinghamshire[1]	37	407
Milton Keynes UA	8	152
Cambridgeshire[1]	63	473
Peterborough UA	13	102
Cheshire[1]	53	532
Halton UA	7	97
Warrington UA	15	127
Hartlepool UA	1	40
Middlesbrough UA	5	63
Redcar and Cleveland UA	10	58
Stockton on Tees UA	6	75
Cornwall	30	272
Cumbria	62	495
Derbyshire[1]	56	566
City of Derby UA	4	124
Devon[1]	38	370
Plymouth UA	9	96
Torbay UA	1	54
Dorset[1]	24	311
Bournemouth UA	6	101
Poole UA	5	57
Durham[1]	28	192
Darlington UA	5	40
East Sussex[1]	33	417
Brighton and Hove UA	15	148
Essex[1]	94	983
Southend on Sea UA	11	75
Thurrock UA	7	117
Gloucestershire	47	306
Hampshire[1]	78	865
Portsmouth UA	5	114
Southampton UA	12	119
Herefordshire UA*	13	166
Hertfordshire	52	884
East Riding of Yorkshire UA	42	258
Kingston upon Hull UA	11	145
North East Lincolnshire UA	9	116
North Lincolnshire UA	14	109
Isle of Wight UA	5	90
Kent[1]	89	927
Medway Town UA	11	102
Lancashire[1]	65	919
Blackburn with Darwen UA	7	74
Blackpool UA	7	133
Leicestershire[1]	65	332
City of Leicester UA	16	105
Rutland UA	5	27
Lincolnshire	104	662
Norfolk	71	698
Northamptonshire	76	662
Northumberland	34	202
North Yorkshire[1]	59	876
City of York UA	9	122
Nottinghamshire[1]	48	629
City of Nottingham UA	16	242
Oxfordshire	57	522
Shropshire[1]	35	282
Telford and Wrekin UA	10	106
Somerset	34	283
Staffordshire[1]	47	303

Numbers of killed and seriously injured casualties in 1999

Metropolitan areas/ Unitary Authority (UA)/County	*Killed*	*Seriously injured*
Stoke on Trent UA	8	82
Suffolk	48	432
Surrey	73	717
Warwickshire	50	558
West Sussex	45	507
Wiltshire[1]	42	320
Swindon UA	7	102
Worcestershire*	17	364
England	2,922	33,710
Wales	191	1,678
Scotland	310	3,734
Great Britain	3,423	39,122

[1] Excludes UA

Medium-density Fibreboard

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research has been carried out by the Health and Safety Executive into the long-term health effects and hazards presented by medium-density fibreboard; and if he will make a statement. [161051]

Mr. Meacher: In 1997 the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) undertook a review of all available scientific evidence about the possible ill-health effects arising from exposure to medium-density fibreboard (MDF) dust.

HSE's review and research concluded that the health hazards associated with exposures arising from working with MDF are similar to those associated with working with natural wood (e.g. softwood and hardwood).

Under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1999, there are duties on employers to control exposures to substances which may be hazardous to health. Under these regulations formaldehyde, hardwood dusts and softwood dusts (the usual constituent parts of MDF) are subject to maximum exposure limits (MELs). These are limits on the airborne concentrations of substances in the workplace, measured over specific reference time periods. There is a duty to control exposure to substances with a MEL to a level as low as is reasonably practicable, and in any case below the value of the MEL. This duty does not stop once the MEL level has been achieved but continues until all that is reasonably practicable has been done.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information the Health and Safety Executive has collated from *(a)* European Union countries and *(b)* North America on (i) the rules governing the use of medium-density fibreboard and (ii) research undertaken into respiratory and other hazards presented by its use; and if he will make a statement. [161052]

Mr. Meacher: In many European Union (EU) countries and the USA, the rules applying to use of medium-density fibreboard (MDF) at work are similar in principle to those applied in Great Britain. Adequate control of exposure through inhalation of dust or fume is assessed by compliance with occupational exposure limits for wood dust and formaldehyde. There is some variation in the scope of the limits (i.e. which types of wood are covered), the numerical values, and the detailed nature of the duties on employers associated with inhalation control.

The Health and Safety Executive is not aware of any research in EU or North American countries into the health hazards presented by use of MDF.

Local Government Ombudsman

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to improve *(a)* the response time of and *(b)* the public's access to the local government ombudsman. [161026]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 6 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 153W.

Planning Controls

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to what extent his Department has been able to make progress with its proposals to remove Crown exemption from statutory planning controls, currently contained in DETR circular 18/84, as envisaged in a letter from his Department to the Chairman of the Westminster Society of 4 May 2000, which envisaged action as soon as a suitable legislative opportunity arose. [161107]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government remain committed to the removal of Crown exemption from planning controls as soon as a suitable opportunity arises to amend the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In the meantime the non-statutory procedures for the consideration of objections to development proposed by the Crown, set out in DOE Circular 18–84, continue to apply.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will extend the consultation period for the reassessment of the BNFL economic case for the Sellafield MOX plant beyond 7 June; [161118]

(2) if he will set out the criteria used to select Arthur D. Little Ltd. as the consultant for the evaluation of the most recent BNFL economic case for operating its Sellafield MOX plant; which other consultants were considered; from which departmental budget the consultants will be paid; and what *(a)* BNFL and *(b)* other documentation relevant to the assessment and held by official bodies he has made available to the consultants. [161122]

Mr. Meacher: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on how many occasions external radioactivity has been measured as above permissible limits on flasks and rail transporter wagons carrying spent nuclear fuel to Sellafield since April 1998; and what measures are in place to minimise the sweating of radioactivity from nuclear transport flasks. [161121]

Mr. Hill: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Motorway Verges

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much has been spent by his Department on landscaping, horticulture and tree planting on motorway verges in each of the last four years. [159201]

Mr. Prescott: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Richard Thorndike to Mr. Archie Norman, dated 11 May 2001:

The Secretary of State for the Environment Transport and the Regions has asked the Chief Executive, Tim Matthews to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about spending on landscaping, horticulture and tree planting on motorway verges. I am replying in the absence of Tim Matthews.

Responsibility for landscaping, horticulture and tree planting on the motorway and trunk road network in England rests with the Highways Agency. Because of the way our records are kept, we cannot readily separate spending on the motorway network from spending on the trunk road network.

The table below therefore shows total spend recorded on all landscaping, horticulture and tree planting across the network. This includes significant expenditure associated with the environmental treatment of major new schemes, expenditure on the maintenance of existing landscaping and on schemes aimed at supporting the UK's biodiversity strategy, which aims to protect and encourage the diversity of plants and animals. This is in line with the Government policy to reduce the environmental impact of roads, which was one of the major aims of the 1998 Roads Review "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England".

The A34 Newbury Bypass was completed in 1998/99, with its substantial environmental treatment contributing to the overall spend in that year.

£ million

Year	*Spend*
1997–98	7.4
1998–99	35.5
1999–2000	29.3
2000–01	21.4

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if national insurance numbers are checked to ensure that the declared income is the only source of tax income. [158200]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Department uses available information to detect discrepancies in declared income.

When a claim is made for Income Support (IS) or Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) claimants are required to provide evidence of any declared income, for example wage slips for earnings or payment slips for occupational pensions. Details on the pay slips are checked by Benefits Agency (BA) staff for deductions from pay, including the rate of income tax. Where the amount of tax deducted is disproportionate to the gross payment, or the tax code quoted seems inappropriate, further inquiries are made to establish if there is another source of taxable income being paid to the claimant.

Regular checks are made on continuing claims where there is a declared source of income to ensure that any changes have been reported. These checks confirm not only the net payment made to the claimant but the details of any deductions for tax and NI. Once again, this information can act as an indicator of other taxable income.

In addition to checks made on claims where there is a declared income, the Department work closely with Inland Revenue (IR) to detect those claimants in receipt of IS and JSA who fail to declare that they have commenced remunerative work. Tax form P46 is completed by employers for all new employees who are unable to provide a P45. IR is able to provide data to the Department of all P46 completions on a monthly basis.

The Department match the NINOs of all employees who appear in the P46 data with the NINOs of claimants who have a current claim to IS or JSA. Where the employment start date overlaps a benefit claim by more than four weeks, the case is referred to the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) for investigation.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* initial applications, *(b)* renewal claims, *(c)* reviews and *(d)* appeals for Disability Living Allowance were cleared outside the target clearance times in each month of 1998; and how many (i) initial applications, (ii) renewal claims, (iii) reconsiderations, (iv) supersessions and (v) appeals for Disability Living Allowance were cleared outside the target clearance times in each month of 2000. [160684]

Mr. Bayley: The information is in the tables.

Disability Living Allowance: Numbers and percentages of cases cleared in 1998 which were outside target clearance times

	New claims		*Renewals*		*Reviews within three months*[1]		*Reviews outside three months*[2]		*Appeals*	
Month	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
January	5,306	14	2,503	14	3,291	16	1,936	13	489	10
February	4,585	14	2,202	12	2,730	15	1,572	13	512	12
March	3,746	11	2,315	13	2,652	15	1,534	13	424	8
April	2,545	8	2,147	15	2,018	13	1,004	11	274	7
May	2,704	9	2,440	18	1,557	12	890	11	324	8
June	3,072	9	3,002	19	1,906	12	1,288	12	378	9
July	3,207	9	3,304	20	1,909	12	1,618	15	432	10
August	3,038	10	3,047	23	1,858	14	1,631	17	368	10
September	3,446	11	4,332	26	1,972	13	1,994	17	394	10
October	4,054	13	3,563	20	2,014	13	2,056	16	516	12
November	6,353	18	3,566	20	2,227	15	2,053	17	431	11
December	4,991	17	2,744	19	1,730	15	1,411	15	349	11

[1] Cases where the existing decision may be changed from the date it came into effect

[2] Cases where the existing decision may be superseded from a later date

Disability Living Allowance: Numbers and percentages of cases cleared in 2000 which were outside target clearance times

	New claims		*Renewals*		*Reconsiderations*[1]		*Supersessions*[1]		*Appeals*	
Month	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
January	8,514	30	7,004	43	469	7	650	21	1,303	34
February	10,448	32	7,422	43	2,186	25	2,935	41	2,405	45
March	9,860	28	7,250	36	4,271	39	6,269	53	3,648	52
April	3,134	12	1,907	11	1,460	18	2,711	21	2,470	42
May	3,852	11	1,990	10	1,728	16	3,021	18	3,355	43
June	5,003	12	2,556	12	1,319	12	2,741	15	3,840	45
July	5,194	13	2,291	8	1,093	9	2,896	14	3,776	38
August	5,408	14	1,317	8	912	8	2,024	13	3,594	30
September	4,655	13	1,153	7	701	7	1,740	13	3,946	34
October	4,161	12	1,258	7	764	7	1,795	13	3,842	29
November	3,566	10	705	4	745	7	1,377	10	2,719	21
December	2,194	9	642	5	446	6	892	9	1,379	19

[1] Reconsiderations and supersessions replaced reviews under the new system of decision making and appeals which was introduced from October 1999

The number of people who receive Disability Living Allowance continues to increase. Significant backlogs of work accrued in the processing of this benefit last year, because of the growing case load and introduction of a new system of decision making and appeals. The Benefits Agency tackled the backlog as a priority and it has now been substantially cleared. The continuing high level of appeals cleared outside of the target clearance time reflects in the numbers received following the introduction of the new procedures.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160882]

Mr. Rooker: Our records show that of 132 senior civil servants in this Department five have signed a waiver under the Working Time Regulations.

Social Inclusion

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the funding programmes for social inclusion for which his Department is responsible that can be accessed by *(a)* national sports bodies and *(b)* local clubs and communities. [161010]

Mr. Bayley: The Department does not have any responsibilities for funding the type of social inclusion programmes described in the question.

Expenditure and Caseloads

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) of 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 594W, what analysis his Department has carried out on the changes in the growth of social security expenditure to isolate the changes in benefit expenditure on (i) unemployed claimants, (ii) single parents, (iii) changes in entitlement arising from legislation passed prior to May 1997, (iv) changes in entitlement arising from legislation passed since May 1997 and (v) other causes; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [160839]

Mr. Rooker: No analysis has been made in the format outlined in the question, as it would not be possible to identify separately the continuing effects of all legislation since 1991–92.

The analysis that has been carried out is presented in the table.

2001–01 prices[1]

£ billion

	Expenditure on unemployed people[2]	*Expenditure on lone parents*[3]	*Expenditure arising from legislative change since May 1997*[4]
1991–92	9.5	5.5	n/a
1996–97	8.4	8.1	n/a
change from 1991–92	−1.1	+2.6	n/a
2000–01	4.2	7.4	2.5
change from 1991–92	−5.3	+2.0	n/a
change from 1996–97	−4.2	−0.6	2.5
2003–04	4.2	7.2	8.8
change from 1991–92	−5.3	+1.7	n/a
change from 1996–97	−4.2	−0.8	8.8

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion. Change figures may not appear to sum due to rounding.

[2] Expenditure on unemployed people by reason of their unemployment, through Unemployment Benefit (1996–97 only), Income Support (1996–97 only), Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing and Council Tax Benefits.

[3] Expenditure on lone parents by reason of their lone parent status, through Income Support, Housing and Council Tax Benefits.

[4] Figures relate to new measures affecting Social Security benefits for pensioners and families. They do not include Working Families' Tax Credit or Disabled Person's Tax Credit.

Analysis of changes in expenditure on unemployed people and lone parents has been made from administrative data. Analysis of the change in expenditure arising from legislation since May 1997 affecting social security benefits for pensioners and families has been made using administrative data and statistical models. The figures provided by the different analyses are not mutually exclusive, in that some of the changes in expenditure arising from legislative change will have applied to unemployed people and lone parents, notably the increases in child amounts in income-related benefits. Therefore, the change figures cannot be added together. The figures do not account for all the changes since 1991–92, nor do they cover all groups of recipients.

Child Support

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many child support cases have been calculated using the new assessment procedure in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999. [161049]

Angela Eagle: Section 80 of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999 amended the Child Support Act 1991 to permit the Inland Revenue to disclose information on the earnings of self-employed non-resident parents to the Child Support Agency for the purposes of assessing child support liability.

As at 16 March 2001 the Agency had contacted the Inland Revenue on 7,632 occasions for income details of self-employed non-resident parents.

Stakeholder Pension Schemes

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many stakeholder pension schemes have been registered; and what other information the Government will routinely collect on this type of pension. [161047]

Mr. Rooker: 47 stakeholder pension schemes have been registered so far.

We will collect a range of information about stakeholder pensions. This will include the number of individuals (broken down by gender, age and earnings) as well as the value of contributions made.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people eligible for a non-automatic Winter Fuel Payment for winter 2000 who did not claim the benefit. [161048]

Mr. Rooker: Around 1.3 million people have made successful claims for Winter Fuel Payments in respect of winter 2000 out of a possible 1.5 million people that might have been eligible.

An information campaign has been running since last April. Its aim has been to ensure that existing and potential customers know about changes to the scheme and what, if anything, they need to do to get a payment. It was up to the individual to choose whether to claim a payment.

Pensioner Incomes (Devon)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples in the Torbay, Teignbridge and Totnes constituencies have weekly incomes below (i) £80, (ii) £90, (iii) £100, (iv) £125, (v) £150, (vi) £175 and (vii) £200. [161032]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make it her policy to ensure an air strip is available in St Helena *(a)* at the same time and *(b)* before one becomes available at Pitcairn. [160859]

Clare Short: We are currently waiting for the results of a Comparative Study of Air and Sea Access to identify the least cost solution to St. Helena's future international passenger and cargo transport needs. The final report is expected shortly and its recommendations will then need to be discussed with the St. Helena Government. The results of that study cannot be prejudiced and no presumption can be made that it will lead to support being offered for the provision of an airfield.

HEALTH

Worcestershire NHS Acute Hospitals Trust

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of current bed availability in the Worcestershire NHS Acute Hospitals Trust; and if he will make a statement. [154587]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 20 March 2001]:* Assessment of current bed availability in Worcestershire is ongoing on a number of levels. On a practical level there are weekly meetings within the trust to maximise the use of current capacity and review any delayed transfers of care. The health authority works in partnership with Social Services and National Health Service colleagues to address capacity issues through weekly meetings of the local Winter Operational Forum.

In relation to the longer-term position the Worcestershire Health Authority is currently modelling bed numbers and capacity for the year ahead.

The health authority's modelling work on bed numbers will take into account the Government's National Beds Inquiry and the total number of beds available within Worcestershire to care for patients in the most appropriate location after the new hospital opens will actually be in line with the national average.

Shelton Hospital

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the impact of his approval of an acute ward at Shelton hospital. [156514]

Yvette Cooper: I am informed that Shropshire's Community and Mental Health National Health Service trust is in the process of developing plans for replacement Child Development Centres and the replacement of Adult Acute Mental Health wards. However, approval has not yet been given to an acute ward at Shelton Hospital, and no business case has been received by the NHS Executive: West Midlands Regional Office in regard to these developments.

The Government are committed to investment in modernising and improving facilities for patients and staff, and the Regional Office will give full consideration to any business case received from Shropshire's Community and Mental Health National Health Service trust within the usual processes.

Smoking Cessation Services

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much new money was spent in England on specialist advice and support for the NHS for smokers waiting to quit in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; what the figure will be for 2001–02; and if he will reconcile these figures with those in paragraph 4.9 of the 1998 White Paper "Smoking Kills". [158352]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* In "Smoking Kills" we undertook to invest up to £60 million of new money for smoking cessation services over the three years 1999–2000 to 2001–02. We expect to exceed this commitment. Investment in the sevices has been:

1999–2000: £10 million (health action zones only).

2000–01: £20 million (£10 million HAZs, £10 million non-HAZ health authorities).

2001–02: £20 million (310 million HAZs, £10 million non-HAZ Has) with an additional £3 million to provide a co-ordinator for services for pregnant services.

In addition, we have made provision for health authorities to cover the cost of the recently de-blacklisted Zyban and nicotine replacement therapy, which we expect to cost between £10.5 million and £42 million per year.

Cardiothoracic Hospital, Paddington Basin

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment the Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster health authority has made of the effect upon access to its proposed new cardiothoracic hospital in Paddington Basin of road user charges upon *(a)* patients, *(b)* staff and *(c)* relatives and friends of patients. [158604]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The impact of national and local strategies for public and private transport will be the subject of work requested by Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster health authority. This work is to be included in the full business case for the proposed Paddington Basin development.

Audiology Services

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to recruit more staff into audiology services. [160072]

Mr. Hutton: There are currently around 1,400 audiologists, 300 audiological scientists and 120 hearing therapists working in the National Health Service. The Department of Health is working with the National Advisory Group for Scientists and Technicians on a number of initiatives that will help try to improve recruitment and retention of staff into audiology services.

The "Modernising NHS hearing aid services" project will examine all the issues, including staff numbers, involved in modernisation of audiological services. Having the correct balance of staff numbers and grades is one of the keys to developing an effective and modern service.

Herbal Remedies

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that the provisions of the proposed European Traditional Medicines Directive do not restrict the ability to continue to market in the United Kingdom herbal products which are on the market as *(a)* herbal medicines exempt from licensing under section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968 and *(b)* foods; [159959]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that the proposed European Traditional Medicines Directive does not impose upon traditional herbal remedies a technical compliance regime based upon criteria established in the Medicines Directive 65/65 and related legislation for pharmaceutical products; [159947]

(3) what progress is being made by the Medicines Control Agency in discussions at the European Commission Pharmaceutical Committee in relation to the proposed Traditional Medicines Directive; and what assessment he has made of the likelihood of those discussions leading to a directive that would meet his objective of securing in European law a safe home for herbal remedies marketed under section 12 of the Medicines Act 1968 as medicines not requiring a product licence; [159960]

(4) if he will make a statement on the impact of the proposed European Traditional Medicines Directive on product innovation and development in natural remedies. [159948]

Yvette Cooper: The draft directive would not affect products which are not classified as medicines.

In discussions with herbal interest groups, the Medicines Control Agency has reached a wide measure of consensus that the current regulatory arrangements which permit unlicensed herbal remedies under section 12(2) of the Medicines Act 1968 do not provide adequate safeguards for the public: there are no specific standards for the safety and quality of individual products under this regime, and there are inadequate arrangements for providing the public information about the use of the product.

Although work is still at a relatively early stage, we are encouraged by progress in Europe on developing a draft directive on traditional medicinal products. We expect that if negotiations are successful, this legislation would provide systematic regulatory arrangements for a wide range of traditional herbal remedies of the kind currently sold and supplied under section 12(2).

Any systematic updated regulatory regime for traditional herbal remedies is likely to place greater constraints on companies than is currently the case with the weak regulatory arrangements for unlicensed herbal remedies. A potential advantage for companies, however, is the greater confidence the public could have in the safety and reliability of these products.

We take the view that traditional herbal remedies properly classified as medicines should be appropriately regulated within a medicines regime. Standards should be consistent with those applying to other licensed medicines, including the many herbal medicines which have received a marketing authorisation under Directive 65/65/EEC. We also wish to ensure that relevant regulatory requirements developed for traditional medicines are in practice applied in a way that is appropriate to the nature of the specific product under consideration.

The current draft directive includes several features which would have the effect of containing the burden of regulatory requirements: for example, the possibility of a positive list of traditional medicines where in certain defined circumstances the safety of the product and the requirement to demonstrate traditional usage could both be accepted as met without the applicant presenting evidence, and the possibility of simplified quality dossiers for defined categories of traditional medicines.

On product innovation, a key feature of the proposed directive is that the usual requirement for medicines to demonstrate efficacy would be replaced by a requirement to show evidence of traditional use. There will need to be continuing discussions about many aspects of the detailed contents of the directive. Our starting point, however, is that where companies are seeking to bring a new medicine, natural or otherwise, to the market the normal route should be through demonstration of the product's safety, quality and efficacy.

Kidderminster Hospital

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from Wyre Forest district council regarding Kidderminster hospital; and if he will make a statement. [160403]

Yvette Cooper: Representatives of Wyre Forest district council have written to Ministers on many occasions concerning their opposition to the relocation of services from Kidderminster hospital.

However, local general practitioners have publicly confirmed their belief that the move of services for clinical safety reasons was appropriate and local hospital clinicians have been fully engaged in the process.

The recently established Wyre Forest Primary Care Trust is also committed to supporting the changes that have taken place and is well placed to strengthen local influence and leadership on health service provision in Kidderminster.

The newly approved £13 million Ambulatory Care Centre offers an opportunity to further develop quality services and is good news for Kidderminster, as it maximises an effective and patient-focused service provision within those services that can be provided safely at the hospital.

Capital Spending (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the current capital projects and their value in community and mental health services in Shrewsbury and Atcham; and if he will make a statement. [160367]

Yvette Cooper: National Health Service trusts receive discretionary block capital with which to address small scale capital works. Shropshire's Community and Mental Health Services National Health Service Trust has received a £1.3 million discretionary block capital allocation, from which it is funding a programme of smaller estates projects throughout the county, most of which are to do with maintenance works.

Funding for larger capital projects must be pursued via the local NHS Executive regional office. The NHS Executive: West Midlands Regional Office is not currently dealing with any business cases for capital projects in Shrewsbury and Atcham. However, I am informed that Shropshire's Community and Mental Health Services National Health Service Trust is in the process of developing plans for replacement Child Development Centres and the replacement of Adult Acute Mental Health wards.

Flu Immunisation

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of over 65-year-olds received flu immunisation in *(a)* the winter of 1997 and *(b)* the winter of 2000; and if he will make a statement. [160369]

Yvette Cooper: Last year, we extended the recommended groups for influenza immunisation to include everyone aged 65 and over, irrespective of their underlying health, as well as younger people in established high-risk groups. This increase has led to record numbers of vaccine being made available, nearly 11 million this year compared to 7.8 million last year—an increase of 40 per cent. Previous policy was to vaccinate all those over 75 years of age.

Data collected from the Public Health Laboratory Service give an estimate from population samples that 45.2 per cent. of 65s and over were immunised in the winter of 1997–98.

Last year, for the first time, health authorities were set the target of achieving a minimum 60 per cent. uptake of immunisation among people aged 65 years and over in their areas—and also for the first time were required to provide accurate monitoring of uptake. Final data received from health authority flu co-ordinators at the end of December 2000, indicated that 65 per cent. of people aged 65 years and over received their flu immunisation.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general and *(b)* acute NHS hospital beds there were at the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital in each year for 1997 to date; and if he will make a statement. [160365]

Yvette Cooper: National Health Service trusts provide healthcare, but may provide it at more than one site. Data are not collected on an individual site basis, but by entire NHS trust. The bed data for Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust are as follows.

Bed availability in Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust 1997–98 to 1999–2000

	Sector		
Year	*Acute*	*General and acute*	*Total beds*
1997–98	354	393	462
1998–99	375	417	486
1999–2000	374	431	499

Source:
KH03 Department of Health

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding his Department has given to the London Ambulance Service during the last 12 months. [160270]

Mr. Denham: During the financial year 2000–01, the Department directly gave the London Ambulance Service £4.25 million; the London Ambulance Service's total income for 2000–01 was £121 million.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on TB in Gloucestershire. [160669]

Yvette Cooper: The latest available information from the Public Health Laboratory Service shows that the incidence of tuberculosis in Gloucestershire in 2000 was 5.3 cases per 100,000 population, compared to a national incidence of 10.9 per 100,000 population.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on the vaccination of children against TB. [160743]

Yvette Cooper: United Kingdom immunisation policy against tuberculosis is set out in the UK Health Departments' Guidance "Immunisation Against Infectious Disease". A copy of the latest, 1996 published, edition is in the Library. UK immunisation policy is to offer BCG routinely to school children at between 10 and 14; to offer BCG at birth to specified high-risk groups; and to other specified high-risk groups.

ME

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the number of people diagnosed as suffering from ME in *(a)* England and *(b)* the (i) Cambridgeshire/Peterborough, (ii) Lincolnshire and (iii) Northamptonshire health authority areas. [160330]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Information about actual numbers of people with myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) also known as chronic fatigue syndrome, is very hard to come by because of the problems in producing a precise definition of the illness.

Estimates of the number of people diagnosed as suffering from ME in the specific health authority areas mentioned are not collected centrally.

Heart Disease

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were *(a)* diagnosed with heart failure and *(b)* diagnosed with myocardial infarction in each of the last five years. [160607]

Yvette Cooper: The table contains data for National Health Service hospitals in England in the years 1995–96 to 1999–2000. The figures show the number of finished consultant episodes where the main diagnosis was myocardial infarction or heart failure.

	Myocardial infarction	*Heart failue*
1995–96	107,591	104,391
1996–97	105,230	109,506
1997–98	109,898	113,588
1998–99	106,895	111,722
1999–2000	104,428	111,048

A finished consultant episode is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within a year. The figures will also not show those people who received care wholly in a primary care setting.

The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the hospital episode statistics dataset and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.

Data for 1995–96 to 1997–98 are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data: 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are ungrossed.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total number of undiagnosed heart failure sufferers. [160608]

Yvette Cooper: Data published in the British Heart Journal in 1994 states that heart failure affects between 0.4 per cent. and 0.8 per cent. of the general population in the United Kingdom. However, the authors of that report estimated that the prevalence of heart failure is more likely to be in the region of 1.5 per cent., which suggests about two thirds of people with heart failure are undiagnosed.

We recognise that heart failure is a previously under-recognised area, which is why Chapter Six of the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease deals specifically with its diagnosis and treatment.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the use of *(a)* beta blockers and *(b)* ACE inhibitors in the treatment of heart failure; and if he will make a statement. [160600]

Yvette Cooper: Our position on treatment of heart failure is set out in the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease. The NSF standard states that people with a confirmed diagnosis of heart failure should be offered treatments most likely to both relieve symptoms and reduce their risk of death. First line treatment should be with ACE inhibitors, which can be used in combination with beta-blockers.

We have also commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to produce a clinical guideline on the management of heart failure. Work on this should start shortly.

Information on the use of ACE inhibitors and beta-blockers for heart failure is not currently collected. However, as part of the NSF implementation programme, by 2002, every hospital will have clinical audit data describing the delivery of key treatments such as ACE inhibitors and beta-blockers for heart failure. By 2003, every primary care team will collect audit data including the number and percentage of people with confirmed heart failure or left ventricular dysfunction who are being prescribed an ACE inhibitor.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance he has issued to enable general practitioners accurately to identify heart failure patients. [160601]

Yvette Cooper: The National Service Framework for coronary heart disease, published on 6 March 2000, provides guidance on the identification and diagnosis of heart failure patients. This includes advice on service models and an algorithm for the assessment of suspected heart failure.

We have also commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to produce a clinical guideline on the investigation and management of heart failure. Work on this is due to start later in the year.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps he has taken to enable *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* general practitioners to develop accurate and speedy diagnoses of heart failure. [160602]

Yvette Cooper: Our position on the treatment of heart failure is set out in chapter 6 of the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease. The NSF standard states that doctors should arrange for people with suspected heart failure to be offered appropriate investigations that will confirm or refute the diagnosis.

We need to improve access to echocardiography to help more people to get a quick and accurate diagnosis of heart failure. As a first step, money from the Treasury Capital Modernisation Fund has funded the purchase of over 50 echocardiography machines.

We have also commissioned the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to produce a clinical guideline on the investigation and management of heart failure. Work on this is due to start later this year.

Leukaemia (Oldbury Nuclear Power Station)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will evaluate the research by Dr. Chris Binky on the possible links between childhood leukaemia and adult cases to proximity to Oldbury nuclear power station. [160283]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* The independent Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE), which advises Government on such matters had already recommended an investigation of the geographical distribution of childhood cancer and leukaemia in Great Britain and how the pattern of cases around nuclear installations compares with the national pattern. This study is nearing completion and my Department has asked COMARE to advise on which, if any, nuclear installations have incidences of childhood cancer and leukaemia in their vicinity which are statistically outside the distribution seen nationally. COMARE are hoping to report this year. In addition the health authority will examine any research sent to them around the Oldbury nuclear power station.

Strokes (Women)

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to combat the incidence of stroke in women. [160541]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Key risk factors for stroke include poor diet, smoking, obesity, alcohol misuse and physical inactivity. The Department is taking action to address the incidence of stroke through the National Service Frameworks (NSFs) for Coronary Heart Disease and Older People. Action is being taken forward to:

improve access to healthy food through the five-a-day programme and work with industry to reduce salt in food.

provide National Health Service smoking cessation services including dedicated services for pregnant smokers who want to give up.

address alcohol misuse through the National Strategy to Tackle Alcohol Misuse

increase opportunities to exercise through the provision of services locally such as Exercise Referral schemes.

The National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease has set a milestone that by April 2001, all NHS bodies, working closely with local authorities, will have agreed and be contributing to delivery of local programmes on smoking, healthy eating, physical activity and overweight and obesity.

Cancer (Severn Estuary)

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what incidence of cancer there has been, on a postcode basis, for the Severn Estuary region for the most recent three year period for which figures are available. [160788]

Yvette Cooper: The Department does not collect the information in the form requested. For detailed information the hon. Member should contact Dr. Jennifer Smith, Director of the South and West Cancer Intelligence Service at Highcroft, Romsey Road, Winchester, Hampshire, SO22 5DH.

Mental Health

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of health spending was allocated to treatment and research into mental health in the last financial year. [160784]

Mr. Hutton: Information on mental health expenditure for 2000–01 is not yet available.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank each health authority in England and Wales by incidence of *(a)* psychiatric morbidity and *(b)* schizophrenia. [160973]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not available centrally.

In 1993, the Department commissioned surveys by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) into the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among adults aged 16–64 living in private households and other institutions in Great Britain. It is estimated that about one adult in six in the United Kingdom aged between 16 and 64 suffers from some form of mental illness. This includes psychosis, (a prevalence of 44 per 1000 population) of which schizophrenia makes up less than one per cent. The results of the surveys were presented in a series of reports covering prevalence of psychiatric problems among adults as well as their associated social disabilities and uses of services.

It is also estimated that one child in ten between the ages of 5 and 15 suffers from a mental disorder in Great Britain. The source for the prevalence of mental disorder in children is a survey on mental health of children and adolescents in private households carried out by the ONS in 1999.

The information at health authority level is not reliable because of the sample size used in the surveys.

Professor Dick Van Velzen

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will (1) require the Medicines Control Agency to re-examine research findings by Professor Dick Van Velzen into medicines used in the treatment of cystic fibrosis; [160707]

(2) meet Professor John Dodge of the University of Wales, to discuss his concerns about research undertaken by Professor Dick Van Velzen into the treatment of cystic fibrosis. [160706]

Mr. Denham: In 1994–95 Professor Van Velzen undertook research into bowel strictures (fibrosing colonopathy) reported in children with cystic fibrosis, as one of several pathologists, paediatricians and epidemiologists. The study report, together with other information, led to warnings from the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) on the use of high-strength pancreatic enzymes. There have been no new confirmed cases of fibrosing colonopathy reported to the CSM since their advice was issued in 1995. The study to which Professors Van Velzen and Dodge contributed was published in The Lancet, and I refer my hon. Friend to correspondence on this issue published in The Lancet dated 12 May 2001. We do not consider a meeting with Professor Dodge to be necessary.

Doctors and Nurses (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses there are per 1,000 patients in each NHS trust in Greater Manchester. [159782]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Population figures are available only on a health authority basis. These figures are not directly comparable to National Health Service trusts as patients can often cross health authority boundaries for their treatment.

Maternity Services

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards midwife-led maternity units; and how much of the recently announced extra expenditure for maternity services will be allocated to them. [160719]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer sent 10 May 2001]:* Every single maternity unit in the country will benefit from the extra investment of £100 million which was announced recently. All maternity units, including midwife-led units, will have the opportunity to submit a bid to their regional heath authority to help modernise and improve services. No decisions have yet been made on the allocations to individual regions.

We believe that women must have more choices over the maternity care they receive. The National Heath Service provides a variety of types of care for women during pregnancy and childbirth including care in midwife led units. We would expect to see this variety continue, offering individual choice whenever possible.

The Maternity and Neonatal Workforce Working Group that has recently been set up by the Department will advise the Department on models of care, working practices and standards for maternity and neonatal care, to ensure the best outcomes for women and their babies.

Walsall (Funding)

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available to the Borough of Walsall by his Department since June 1997. [160995]

Yvette Cooper: Detailed information on the impact of Department of Health policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2000–01" is available in the Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

My hon. Friend's question relates to the geographical area covered by Walsall health authority and Walsall social services authority.

Walsall health authority general allocations on behalf of its resident population for 2001–02 compared with 1997–98 is set out in the table.

Increases in allocations between 1997–98 and 2001–02

	Increase
£ million (cash)	53.6
£ million (real terms)	35.0
Percentage (cash)	40.7
Percentage (real terms)	24.6

Note:

Not directly comparable from 1999–2000 onwards due to introduction of unified budgets for HA and primary care services

Walsall health authority has also received additional funding for certain policies. This includes: £0.7 million for accident and emergency modernisation; £0.37 million allocated since 1997 for specific cancer services (breast, colorectal and lung cancer services and cancer outpatient services) as well as £0.11 million allocated for cancer equipment; £3.43 million to deliver improvements in inpatient waiting lists and outpatient waiting times; £0.67 million for Booked Admissions Projects; £0.71 million to expand critical care services in 2000–01; £0.75 million winter pressures in 2000–01; £0.11 million for heart disease services 2000–01; £0.03 million from Investing in Dentistry; £0.18 million Health Action Zone moneys for smoking cessation.

Walsall is the lead health authority for the proposed £43 million "5th wave" scheme at Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust and Walsall Community Health NHS Trust—work to develop this scheme is due to begin in 2002.

Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust has also received £0.5 million from the Local Capital Modernisation Fund for new hospital equipment and other projects proposed by clinical teams.

Walsall local authority's personal social services standard spending assessment for 2001–02 compared with 1996–97 is set out in the table.

		Percentage increase	
	£ million	*Real*	*Cash*
1996–97	39.4	—	—
2001–02	52.7	18.5	33.8

In addition to the SSAs referred to, Walsall local authority received additional funding in the form of a number of special and specific grants as set out in the table.

£000

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Special Transitional Grant[1]	2,136	—	—	—

£000

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Partnership grant[2]	—	1,546	1,311	1,766
Prevention grant[2]	—	112	167	
Carers grant[3]	—	114	282	391
Children's grant[3]	—	463	726	1,710
MH Core grant	283	477	551	[4]820
Training Support Grant	206	212	222	[4]198

[1] The special transitional grant ended in 1998–99

[2] The partnership and prevention grants have been combined in 2001–02 and called the promoting independence grant

[3] The carers' and children's grants were introduced in 1999–2000

[4] Indicative allocation

Social Inclusion

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the funding programmes for social inclusion for which his Department is responsible that can be accessed by *(a)* national sports bodies and *(b)* local clubs and communities. [161008]

Yvette Cooper: Funding can be accessed from the Department through the following routes:

(1) Health Action Zones (HAZs) are multi-agency partnerships between the National Health Service, local authorities (including social services), the voluntary and business sectors and local communities. Their aim is to tackle inequalities in health in the most deprived areas of the country through health and social care modernisation programmes. As well as tackling key priorities such as coronary heart disease, cancer and mental health, and issues such as teenage pregnancy and smoking cessation, they are addressing other interdependent and wider determinants of health, such as housing, education and employment, and linking with other initiatives. As part of their local involvement programmes, many HAZs run "Community Chest" schemes where they invite applications from the local community to bid for funds for specific local projects.

(2) The National Service Framework for coronary heart disease and health improvement programmes enable health authorities to work with local health economies on the development of local programmes on smoking, healthy eating, physical activity, overweight and obesity. These programmes will be accessible to national sport bodies, local clubs and communities. One element of local plans to promote physical activity may be exercise referral schemes. These schemes involve a general practitioner or practice nurse referring a patient to facilities such as leisure centres or gyms for a supervised exercise programme.

(3) Section 64 grants provide money to voluntary organisations running projects connected to public health and social care.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 26 January, 1 March and 5 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss P. Mills; [160954]

(2) when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 7 April and 3 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. E. Graal; [160956]

(3) when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 8 February, 8 March and 12 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. E. Jones. [160960]

Ms Stuart: It is the Department's intention to reply to all outstanding correspondence from hon. and right hon. Members before the general election.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 1 February, 1 March and 5 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A. Battersby; [160959]

(2) when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 2 April and 3 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Dr. Ben Glaizner; [160957]

(3) when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 7 March and 12 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss L. Collins; [160958]

(4) when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 3 April and 3 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Dr. D. Bishop. [160961]

Ms Stuart: Replies to my right hon. Friend's letters were sent on 10 May.

Adoption

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adoptions of children *(a)* three years and under and *(b)* over three years broke down in (i) Stockton, (ii) Teesside and (iii) nationally, in each of the last three years. [160877]

Mr. Hutton: The Department of Health does not collect information on the number of adoptions which break down after the adoption order has been made.

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children *(a)* under the age of three years and *(b)* three years and older were placed for adoption in each of the last three years in (i) Stockton, (ii) Teesside and (iii) nationally. [160879]

Mr. Hutton: The information is as follows.

Estimated number of children[1] placed for adoption, by age and selected local authority, at 31 March 1998–2000

Age at 31 March	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
3 years and over			
Stockton on Tees	n/a	n/a	n/a
Teesside[2]	19	17	24
England	1,100	1,400	1,600
Under 3 years			
Stockton on Tees	n/a	n/a	n/a
Teesside[2]	34	21	16
England	1,300	1,500	1,600
All ages			
Stockton on Tees	16	11	9
Teesside[2]	53	38	40
England	2,400	2,900	3,100

[1] Figures exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.

[2] For the purpose of this table Teesside is defined as being four local authorities: Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton on Tees.

Note:
Sample numbers in the Department's database are too small to provide reliable estimates.
n/a – not available.

Fostering

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children of *(a)* three years and under and *(b)* over three years were placed in a foster home in each of the last three years in (i) Stockton, (ii) Teesside and (iii) nationally. [160878]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is given in the table.

Estimated number of children[1] in foster care, by age and selected local authority, at 31 arch 1998–2000

Age at 31 March	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Under three years and over			
Stockton on Tees	13	28	25
Teesside[2]	76	92	104
England	5,800	6,000	6,300
Over three years			
Stockton on Tees	81	96	101
Teesside[2]	288	322	336
England	29,200	30,200	31,600
All ages			
Stockton on Tees	94	124	126
Teesside[2]	364	414	440
England	5,000	36,200	37,900

[1] Figures exclude children looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements.

[2] For the purpose of this table Teesside is defined as being four local authorities: Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees.

Roberts' Baby

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the records held at University College Hospital show happened to the internal organs of the Roberts' baby on or after 16 January 1979; [160836]

(2) what records the University College Hospital has regarding the surviving twin, Natalie Roberts, born on 16 January 1979; [160838]

(3) what the cause of death was of the Roberts' baby, born at University College Hospital, on 16 January 1979; [160835]

(4) who signed out the body of the Roberts' baby from University College Hospital on 26 January 1979. [160837]

Mr. Denham: I am aware that this case is in the hands of solicitors and may be the subject of legal proceedings. It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment on this at this time.

South Lancashire

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the changes in the level of NHS spending in south Lancashire as a result of the Budget. [159901]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 May 2001]:* In his Budget statement on 7 March 2001, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced additional resources for the National Health Service in England of £300 million in 2001–02, £295 million in 2002–03 and £240 million in 2003–04.

South Lancashire health authority has received a total allocation of £223.3 million for 2001–02. This represents a cash increase of £18.2 million or 8.89 per cent. Final decisions have not yet been made for 2002–03 and 2003–04 allocations but all health authorities will receive a minimum increase of 6 per cent.

£500,000 has also been allocated to Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust for local capital modernisation projects.

Final decisions on the allocations from the remaining budget money have yet to be made.

GPs (Worthing)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family doctors south of the railway in Worthing are accepting new patients other than at the direction of the health authority; and if he will make a statement. [161096]

Mr. Denham: At present, general practitioners' practices south of the railway line in Worthing are unable to voluntarily register new patients. West Sussex health authority is aware that there is a capacity problem in this area, since 1 April the health authority has allocated 98 patients and work is ongoing with the primary care agency to ensure all patients are registered with a GP. The health authority is currently working closely with primary care providers to provide solutions to this issue.

Plymouth Derriford NHS Trust

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the Plymouth Derriford NHS Trust has spent on legal fees in *(a)* each of the last three financial years and *(b)* the financial year to date; and what steps have been taken in relation to the patients whose personal details came into the possession of Channel 4 Television. [161055]

Mr. Denham: The Department does not collect information on spending on legal services by National Health Service trusts.

The actions taken as a result of the obtaining of patient confidential information by Channel 4 Television are the responsibility of Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust.

For information on these matters, the hon. Member should contact Mr. Russell Mitchell, Chairman of the trust.

Parliamentary Questions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will provide an answer to the question from the hon. Member for the Vale of York concerning the price of inspection for small and medium-sized abattoirs, ref. 160645. [161110]

Ms Stuart: I replied to the hon. Member on 10 May.

Meningitis

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of deaths ascribed to meningitis for each of the last 10 years. [160927]

Yvette Cooper: Data on the number of deaths attributable to meningitis for the last 10 years (1990–99) have been provided by the Office for National Statistics and are shown in the table. These figures include all causes of bacterial meningitis disease, such as haemophilus influenza type B, meningococcal, pneumococcal, and viral meningitis. It also includes deaths where the type of meningitis has not been specified. Data for deaths attributed to meningitis for 2000 are not yet available.

Number of deaths attributable to meningitis infection (all causes)

Year	Number
1990	242
1991	269
1992	247
1993	253
1994	189
1995	241
1996[1]	289
1997	272
1998	253
1999[1]	209

[1] provisional

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on proposals to inoculate foreign students studying in the UK against meningitis. [160928]

Yvette Cooper: As in line with previous years, we recommend that new first year students coming to United Kingdom universities should obtain meningococcal vaccine in their country of origin before coming to the UK or shortly after arrival.

Fasting

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers he has to intervene in respect of a person *(a)* in psychiatric hospital and *(b)* elsewhere who is seeking to fast to death; and what guidance he has issued to (i) health care workers, (ii) social workers and (iii) others, in respect of the exercise of such powers. [161024]

Yvette Cooper: The Secretary of State for Health has no power to intervene in respect of a person in a psychiatric hospital or elsewhere who is seeking to fast to death. The "Reference Guide to Consent for Examination or Treatment" published in March 2001 (www.doh.gov.uk/consent) provides guidance on English law concerning consent to physical interventions that are relevant to all health care professionals. Further information concerning people detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 may be found in chapters 15 and 16 of the Mental Health Act Code of Practice.

PRIME MINISTER

Correspondence

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Prime Minister when he will reply to the letter dated 4 April from Mrs. Frances Beatty, Regional Director of the Country Landowners Association, regarding animal welfare concerns in connection with foot and mouth disease. [159983]

The Prime Minister: *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Minister for Fisheries and the Countryside wrote my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) to Mrs. Beatty on my behalf on 10 May.

St. Thomas's Hospital Pain Management Clinic

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to visit St. Thomas's hospital pain management clinic in the next four weeks. [161097]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans at present to do so.

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all the occasions on which he has met any of the Hinduja brothers since 1 May 1997. [161102]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Maidstone and the Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on 31 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 224W.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if prior notification of the meeting of 4 June 1998 between the Prime Minister and S. P. Hinduja, G. P. Hinduja and Brajesh Mishra was given to the United States Administration; [161081]

(2) if the United States Administration was notified of the outcome of the meeting of 4 June 1998 between the Prime Minister and S. P. Hinduja, G. P. Hinduja and Brajesh Mishra; [161082]

(3) what assurances he received from the Government of India about the standing and status of S. P. Hinduja and G. P. Hinduja prior to his meeting with them and Brajesh Mishra on 4 June 1998; and if he will make a statement; [161076]

(4) if the British High Commission in Delhi was consulted about the meeting with Brajesh Mishra and the Hinduja brothers on 4 June 1998 prior to its taking place; [161080]

(5) if the Government took prior advice about the Prime Minister's meeting with S. P. Hinduja, G. P. Hinduja and Brajesh Mishra of 4 June 1998 from the Indian High Commissioner in London. [161078]

The Prime Minister: I have regular exchanges on a variety of matters with Commonwealth and foreign Governments. It is established practice under successive Administrations not to disclose details of confidential discussions with such Governments, or confirm whether they have, or have not occurred.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if *(a)* he or *(b)* his office told Sir Anthony Hammond QC of the existence of the exchanges of correspondence that had taken place between him and the Hinduja brothers since 1 May 1997; [161084]

(2) if *(a)* he or *(b)* his office advised Sir Anthony Hammond QC of the Prime Minister's meeting with S. P. Hinduja, G. P. Hinduja and Brajesh Mishra on 4 June 1998. [161077]

The Prime Minister: I made it clear when I set up the independent review headed by Sir Anthony Hammond QC into the applications for naturalisation by S. P. and

G. P. Hinduja, that all relevant information that he required would be made available to him. I also said that it was for Sir Anthony to decide how he carried out the review, what papers and files he needed to see and to whom he needed to speak.

I published Sir Anthony's report in full on 9 March which concluded that:

> "no improper pressure was brought to bear by any Minister in respect of these applications".

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister (1) when he was first asked to agree to the meeting of 4 June 1998 with S. P. Hinduja, G. P. Hinduja and Brajesh Mishra; [161083]

(2) what the purpose was of his meeting on 4 June 1998 with S. P. Hinduja, G. P. Hinduja and Brajesh Mishra; who else was present at the meeting; what official note of the meeting was taken and by whom; and if he will make a statement; [161075]

(3) at whose instigation the meeting with S. P. Hinduja, G. P. Hinduja and Brajesh Mishra on 4 June 1998 took place; and if he will make a statement. [161079]

The Prime Minister: As had been made clear no such meeting took place. I greeted Brajesh Mishra, the Principal Secretary to the Indian Government, who delivered a letter from the Indian Prime Minister. Mr. Mishra then had a meeting with Downing street officials. They discussed Anglo-Indian relations and regional issues.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Trading Standards Departments (Test Purchasing)

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what his Department's policy is on the use of children of compulsory school age in undertaking test purchasing on behalf of local authority trading standards departments during school hours; and if he will make a statement. [158492]

Ms Estelle Morris: Policy on the employment of children is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I refer my hon. Friend to his reply on 26 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 330W.

Education Funding (Shrewsbury and Atcham)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the allocations for literacy and numeracy funding for each school in Shrewsbury and Atcham; and if he will make a statement. [160514]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The allocations for literacy and numeracy for individual schools are determined by local education authorities, and the Department does not collect such information. For 2001–02, Shropshire LEA has been allocated £619,405 for the National Literacy Strategy and £669,904 for the National Numeracy Strategy.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each school in Shrewsbury and Atcham the value of grants given directly by his Department to purchase books since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [160522]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Local education authorities are responsible for determining the allocation of funding to individual schools for the purchase of books, and the Department does not collect such information. Under the Books for Schools grant, Shropshire LEA has received £691,728 since 1997–98.

Departmental Policies (Glasgow, Pollok)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Glasgow, Pollok constituency, the effect on Glasgow, Pollok of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [160825]

Mr. Wills: Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Glasgow, Pollock constituency. The Scotland Office will be able to provide details of education policies.

Modern Apprenticeships

Information on Modern Apprenticeships for all English constituencies was placed in the Library of the House of Commons on 30 March 2001.

New Deal for Young People

In the Glasgow, Pollock constituency, 1,265 young people have joined the New Deal to end February 2001. 565 have found jobs, 385 of which are sustained.

Labour market statistics

The working age employment rate in Glasgow in winter 2000–01 was 63.9 per cent., below the UK rate of 74.5 per cent. The rate in winter 1996–97 was 55.3 per cent.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 17.1 per cent. in March 1997 to 12.1 per cent. in March 2001 in the Glasgow Pollok constituency.

Employment Zones

The Glasgow Employment Zone commenced operation in April 2000. Up to the end of March 2001, 850 participants have found work through the Zone. Of the April 2000 intake of 116 participants, 49 (42.2 per cent.) were found employment, and from the May 2000 intake of 128 participants, 55 (43 per cent.) were found jobs.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he intends to answer the letter to him dated 3 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. I. Hanif. [160925]

Mr. Wills: My right hon. Friend replied to the letter of 3 April on 9 May.

Walsall (Funding)

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding has been made available to the borough of Walsall by his Department since June 1997. [160994]

Ms Estelle Morris: I refer my hon. Friend to the letter sent on 16 February from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, setting out the total funding for Walsall local education authority for the years 1996–97 to 2001–02.

There have been some adjustments made to the capital allocations in 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Following are the updated figures for Walsall local education authority between the years 1997–98 and 2001–02.

£ million

	SSA	*Grants*	*Capital*
1997–98	108.9	4.7	2.2
1998–99	118.2	1.5	3.6
1999–2000	124.6	4.9	8.3
2000–01	130.3	11.2	8.9
2001–02	134.7	10.8	[1]5.9

[1] So far issued

Between 1992–93 and 1997–98, average recurrent funding per pupil fell nationally by £120 in real terms from £2,830 to £2,710. Since then, it has risen by an average of £540 in real terms, to £3,250 this year. By 2003–04, it will have increased by around £750 in real terms since 1997–98.

Remploy

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what targets Remploy has been set in its 2001–02 Annual Performance Agreement. [161103]

Ms Hodge: I have, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, written to the Chairman of Remploy approving the 2001–02 Annual Performance Agreement between the Department and the company. This agreement covers the year from 1 April 2001. It has been negotiated by the Chief Executive of the Employment Service on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The targets are:

the average number of progressions of disabled people will increase to 1,800, including a minimum of 700 to mainstream employment;

Remploy Ltd. will maintain a total unit cost target (operating deficit per disabled worker) of £9,250;

the company will achieve gross margin of £57 million;

non-productive time (excluding time spent on formal training) will be a maximum of 25 per cent.

the company will not exceed its external financing limit of £99.16 million.

The text of the Annual Performance Agreement is contained in the table.

Remploy APA 2001–02: Proposed Targets

	Proposed target 2001–02	*Target 2000–01*	*Forecast outturn 2000–01*
Progressions			
Total	[1]1,800	[2]700	[3]700
of which minimum:			
Factory to Interwork	400	—	—
Interwork to Placement	400	—	—
All sources to mainstream	700	—	—
Total unit cost	£9,250	£9,600	£9,526
External financing limit	[4]£99.16 million	[4]£99.16 million	£99.16 million
Gross margin[5]	£57 million	[5]£53.3 million	[5]£50.9 million
Non-Productive Time (excludes times spent on formal training)	25%	[6]—	31%

[1] The individual targets are 300 short of the overall target. This will enable Remploy to have some flexibility within the total APA.

[2] Includes internal progressions and those to mainstream (unsupported) employment.

[3] Of which 480 to mainstream.

[4] Includes a £5 million loan facility.

[5] This target was negotiated as part of the milestones agreed for release of the additional £5 million modernisation money this year, therefore covers the period January-March 2001 only.

[6] Not an APA target currently.

DEFENCE

Ocean War Graves

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent of trespass by divers, collectors and archaeologists on the site of *(a)* HMS Repulse and *(b)* HMS Prince of Wales and the associated war graves; and what action he is taking to stop such activities. [146063]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 January 2001]:* We are aware of several reported diving expeditions that have taken place in the vicinity of both HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse.

Our High Commission in Singapore and Malaysia where possible will continue to monitor the situation locally.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, 132W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn).

Job Evaluation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason sailors in all ranks are not permitted to view their job evaluation results under the evaluation of the system put forward under Pay 2000; and if he will make a statement. [153978]

Mr. Spellar: The Job Evaluation (JE) system used in the armed forces evaluates the post, not the individual postholder. In view of the total number of service personnel, it is not possible to evaluate posts individually. In practice, a representative sample of jobs is evaluated and the results applied to like jobs undertaken at the same rank. While copies of the full job descriptions generated as part of the evaluation process are made widely available, the final evaluation scores are not released. This is common practice in the wider evaluation industry and is consistently followed throughout the armed forces regardless of rank or Service. The evaluation system and its use are periodically scrutinised by independent consultants on behalf of the Office of Manpower Economics and the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the job evaluation results of the Officer Corps will be published; and if he will make a statement. [153982]

Mr. Spellar: To date, few Officer posts have been evaluated using the current evaluation system. Priority has been given to evaluating non-commissioned personnel to underpin the introduction of the new pay system, Pay 2000. However, a comprehensive programme of Officer evaluation will begin this year and the first tranche of results will be provided to the Armed Forces Pay Review body in September. While copies of the full job descriptions generated by the evaluation process are made widely available, the final scores are not published. This is common practice within the wider evaluation industry.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the recent statement by the Second Sea Lord about the job evaluation system for officers; and if he will make a statement. [153980]

Mr. Spellar: During the course of a discussion with a group of Royal Navy Senior Ratings at HMS Dryad on 28 February 2001, the Second Sea Lord explained that officers below one star rank (Commodore Royal Navy and Brigadier Royal Marines) have not yet been job evaluated. He stated that this was in part due to the career patterns of officers, which can complicate the evaluation process. In addition, the priority has been to complete sufficient job evaluation for non-commissioned personnel to support the introduction of the new pay system, Pay 2000. Prior to its adoption in 1997, the present Job Evaluation system was extensively tested over a wide variety of posts, including over 400 officer posts.

It was demonstrated to be a sufficiently robust system for evaluating jobs at all ranks, including officers. Most senior officer posts at two star rank and above have now been evaluated, and a comprehensive programme to evaluate the remaining officer ranks is about to begin. The aim is to complete the first tranche by September 2001 in accordance with the stated requirements of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Royal Naval personnel of all ranks are permitted to see their Job Evaluations; and if he will make a statement. [158581]

Mr. Spellar: The Job Evaluation (JE) system used in the armed forces evaluates the post, not the individual postholder. In view of the numbers of posts involved, it is not possible to evaluate them individually. In practice, a representative sample of jobs is evaluated and the results applied to like jobs undertaken at the same rank. The single services are extensively involved in the evaluation process. In the Royal Navy, the Director of Naval Manning nominates the individuals whose posts will be evaluated. RN warrant officers conduct the corresponding interviews. A tri-service team of three evaluation judges at RN Captain rank and equivalent then score the jobs.

It is not normal practice within the wider JE industry to release the results for individual posts. This is also the case in the armed forces, regardless of rank or service. Individual results are normally combined with others in the sample population to arrive at scores for a whole trade. On its own, therefore, the result for an individual post is open to misinterpretation. The process used to evaluate the jobs of service personnel is subject to periodic scrutiny by independent consultants acting on behalf of the Office of Manpower Economics and the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.

Eurofighter

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the decision of the Greek Government to postpone the acquisition of 60 Eurofighter Typhoon strike aircraft; [158902]

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on British industry of the decision of the Greek Government to postpone the acquisition of 60 Eurofighter Typhoon strike aircraft. [159370]

Mr. Hoon: The Greek Government's decision to delay the procurement of the aircraft will have no impact on the core Eurofighter programme. The contract is now expected around 2004. It remains an important export order for this excellent aircraft and many UK companies will benefit from the sale.

Defence Assets

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 91–92W, on defence assets, what proportion of total assets *(a)* are available under the Headline Goal at Helsinki, *(b)* are available under the Memorandum of Understanding between the United Kingdom and United Nations and *(c)* are dedicated to other bodies and standing tasks; if he will list those areas where multiple commitments cannot be maintained; and if he will make a statement. [160844]

Mr. Hoon: The potential UK contributions to the UN or to the Headline Goal were identified in my answer to question 159370.

The UK has always made it clear that British forces would be potentially available for operations of all kinds across the crisis spectrum whether under NATO, European Union, UN, OSCE coalition or national auspices. A decision on any particular deployment will be dependent on circumstances at the time, including existing commitments and standing tasks.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160890]

Dr. Moonie: In the Ministry of Defence, seven members of the senior civil service, about 2.5 per cent. of the total, have currently signed waivers to disapply the 48-hour limit on average weekly working time. It is Ministry of Defence policy to discourage long hours of working.

Army Personnel (Removal Costs)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost of moving Army personnel within the United Kingdom in each year from 1994 to 1998; and how many such removals took place in each year. [160975]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of moving Army personnel within the UK and the number of removals for each of the financial years were as follows:

Years	*Total cost (£)*	*Number of removals*
1995–96	5,869,854	9,483
1996–97	6,732,587	9,695
1997–98	7,010,089	8,692
1998–99	7,418,526	8,022

The costs identified above relate to charges for a removal contractor to pack household/personal effects, transport them to the next place of residence, deliver and unpack them. The information for 1994–95 is no longer available.

HMS Gannet

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when anti-submarine warfare operations will cease on a permanent basis from HMS Gannet. [161020]

Mr. Spellar: With effect from April 2002, HMS Gannet will cease to operate as a permanent base for anti-submarine warfare. From this date, it will be used as a forward operating base, activated as and when required, as well as a permanent base for search and rescue operations.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of capital expenditure spent on HMS Gannet in the previous 12 months. [161019]

Mr. Spellar: Capital expenditure at HMS Gannet in the last financial year 2000–01 was approximately £50,000. This was in respect of vehicles and minor plant acquisitions essential to the future role of HMS Gannet as a forward operating base.

Porton Down

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 551W, regarding Porton Down, if his Department's officials conducting the comprehensive survey will speak to *(a)* scientists and staff at Porton Down who conducted the experiments and *(b)* former service personnel who took part in the experiments; and if he will make a statement. [161041]

Dr. Moonie: The historical survey of the Porton Down Volunteer programme will gather information, initially from documentary sources. A decision on whether to contact former Porton Down staff or volunteers will be made at a later date.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 551W, regarding Porton Down, if he will place in the Library a description of each piece of research which has been carried out in response to inquiries from *(a)* former volunteers, *(b)* parliamentarians and *(c)* the Wiltshire police. [161040]

Dr. Moonie: No. I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his previous question of 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 364W, which explained the procedure for allowing former Porton Down volunteers access to information about the trials that they took part in at Porton Down. Each inquiry from an individual volunteer is a research task in itself and the information is personal to the volunteer and Porton Down.

Inquiries from parliamentarians are in two forms: either parliamentary questions to which responses are already in the public domain, or parliamentary inquiries on behalf of an individual. In the case of the latter the information is personal to the volunteer and is given to the parliamentarian in confidence.

Inquiries from the Wiltshire police are subject to ongoing investigation and it would not be appropriate to comment on these at this time.

Plan Colombia (British Training)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of the British *(a)* military and *(b)* other personnel training of the Colombian Government forces, indicating in each case the cost and whether it forms part of Plan Colombia. [160643]

Mr. Spellar: We maintain contacts with the Colombian armed forces and some police units on a range of issues. These contacts occasionally include the provision of training, including counter drugs training, and cost in the region of £70,000 in financial year 2000–01. I am withholding further details under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which covers information whose disclosure would be harmful to national security, defence or international relations.

The United Kingdom has not provided financial or other support to Plan Colombia. Instead the UK is contributing to, and fully supports, assistance to Colombia through the European Union of 105 million euros over the next five years. The EU package will focus on measures to support human rights, long term economic and social development and an end to violence.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Nadhmi Auchi

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials from his Department made representations to (i) the French Government and (ii) other authorities regarding the arrest warrant for British citizen Nadhmi Auchi; on what dates the representations were made; if a Minister from his Department has met him; and if he will make a statement. [160259]

Mr. Vaz: I have been asked to reply.

No representations have been made to either the French Government or other authorities. Details of inquiries made by Mr. Auchi have been passed to the Home Office. On ministerial meetings, I refer to my reply of 23 April.

Crowd Control Technologies

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, what the findings of the DSAC in its October 1999 report were on the injury potential of the L21A1 plastic baton round at the 1 metre minimum range of engagement. [158042]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

Due to a change in specification of the L21A1 baton round system, the October 1999 report was not fully relevant and was therefore not issued.

Criminals (Profit)

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government will take to ensure that criminals do not profit financially from past crimes. [160853]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Under the Proceeds of Crime Bill, for which the Government published draft clauses on 5 March (Cm 5066), a court in England or Wales which is considering whether to make a confiscation order against a convicted defendant who has a criminal lifestyle will be required to assume that any property held by the defendant at any time after conviction, and any property transferred to the defendant during the six years preceding the commencement of the criminal proceedings, was obtained by him as a result of criminal conduct; and that any expenditure incurred by him during the six year period was met from property obtained as a result of such conduct. The court will however be prohibited from making the assumption if it is shown to be incorrect or if making it would give rise to a serious risk of injustice.

A defendant will be considered to have a criminal lifestyle if convicted of drug trafficking, money laundering or any other of a list of offences to be specified in regulations; or if the offence constitutes conduct forming part of a course of criminal activity (this term is defined in draft clause 69); or if the offence was committed over a period of six months or more.

These provisions represent an extension of the circumstances in which such assumptions may be made under existing legislation.

The Bill will also empower the Director of the proposed new Criminal Assets Recovery Agency, which the Bill will create, to seek civil recovery in the High Court of property which has been obtained through unlawful conduct (Part V of the draft Bill). Civil recovery will apply to property obtained through conduct committed before the Bill comes into force. The Government are not minded to insert a limit on the period after the conduct during which property will be recoverable, but are considering this point carefully.

CCTV

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what total funds were *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent on new CCTV projects in the last financial year for which figures are available. [161011]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Under the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) initiative, £4.2 million was allocated to new projects in the financial year 2001–02, and a further £108 million worth of schemes were given outline approval, pending consideration of final bids. In the same year, £23.4 million was spent on CCTV projects, including schemes that had been approved before the beginning of the financial year.

Special Constables

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there were in each police force in England and Wales on *(a)* 31 March 2000, *(b)* 30 September 2000 and *(c)* the most recent date for which figures are available. [161022]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The requested details are given in the table.

Special constable total strength, March 2000 to January 2001

Police force	*March 2000*	*September 2000*	*January 2001*
Avon and Somerset	459	416	402
Bedfordshire	151	134	128
Cambridgeshire	274	214	217
Cheshire	350	307	275
Cleveland	128	122	119
Cumbria	176	167	158
Derbyshire	282	286	287
Devon and Cornwall	870	836	834
Dorset	298	278	275
Durham	157	155	151
Essex	483	478	453
Gloucestershire	206	197	186
Greater Manchester	457	408	391
Hampshire	615	500	470
Hertfordshire	216	214	204
Humberside	246	198	196
Kent	436	416	409
Lancashire	382	362	356
Leicestershire	247	202	175
Lincolnshire	195	179	172
City of London	56	46	46
Merseyside	476	452	513
Metropolitan Police	758	754	762
Norfolk	285	270	257
Northamptonshire	199	195	189
Northumbria	332	323	310
North Yorkshire	217	189	186
Nottinghamshire	411	411	319
South Yorkshire	205	193	185
Staffordshire	482	461	424
Suffolk	391	376	374
Surrey	175	168	167
Sussex	352	317	313
Thames Valley	472	463	445
Warwickshire	260	260	212
West Mercia	476	443	406
West Midlands	680	662	636
West Yorkshire	484	452	411
Wiltshire	173	172	156
Dyfed Powys	202	193	194
Gwent	119	131	147
North Wales	247	233	250
South Wales	267	254	248
Total	14,347	13,487	13,008

Source:

Research Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office.

Immigration, Gatwick

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average morning peak waiting time is for non-EU passengers waiting to clear immigration at Gatwick airport. [160858]

Mrs. Roche: The information requested is not available. The length of time involved in assessing a passenger's eligibility for entry varies considerably depending on the particular situation and on factors such as the availability of interpreters and sponsors, which are outside the control of the Immigration Officer. Every effort is made to deal with each case at the earliest opportunity.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been dispersed through local authorities; and if his Department plans to use local authorities for this purpose in respect of new asylum seekers. [160855]

Mrs. Roche: There is no information held centrally on the number of asylum seekers dispersed by local authorities under the interim dispersal scheme.

The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has entered into contracts with a number of local authorities by which they supply accommodation for asylum seekers supported by NASS and the aim is to continue to do so.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date and for what reasons private accommodation providers were brought in to the process of dispersing asylum seekers to cluster areas. [160854]

Mrs. Roche: Private sector accommodation providers have been part of the process since the beginning of the new arrangements. Their inclusion was necessary in order to meet demand and provide sufficient accommodation throughout the country.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the total number of asylum seekers to be dispersed over the next six months, broken down by region. [161070]

Mrs. Roche: No firm estimate is available on likely number of dispersals as this is dependant upon a number of factors including the number of applications for asylum and the number of those requesting accommodation as part of an application for support. The National Asylum Support Service has established a National Consultation Group of which every consortium is a member.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the costs per asylum seeker of dispersal through *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* private accommodation providers. [160856]

Mrs. Roche: Contracts with local authorities and private accommodation providers for the provision of accommodation for asylum seekers supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) are negotiated by the NASS based on the current market rates and to achieve value for money.

Details of individual contracts cannot be given as they are commercially sensitive.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been dispersed to Scotland in the last 12 months; and at what cost. [161018]

Mrs. Roche: As at the end of March 2001, 2,860[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) were allocated accommodation in Scotland by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

NASS operates as a national system and does not have detailed records of costs involved in dispersal to individual areas.

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he publishes on where asylum seekers live. [161025]

Mrs. Roche: The National Asylum Support Service has a duty of confidentiality to the asylum seekers it supports. Therefore it would be inappropriate to publish information about where asylum seekers live.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers entered at each port of entry in the latest available year. [159753]

Mrs. Roche: The following table details the breakdown of applications for asylum by port of entry. All data were taken from manual counts of asylum applications taken at port, which do not reconcile with the provisional monthly asylum statistics published on http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Total asylum claims at ports of entry, 2000–01[1]

	Number
Heathrow	7,765
Dover East	4,835
Waterloo	4,810
Gatwick	2,870
Cheriton	1,300
Stansted	865
Harwich	240
Manchester	210
Hull	160
London City	155
Ashford	145
Portsmouth	130
Felixstowe	110
Tees Ports	95
Birmingham	70
Luton	65
Newcastle/North Shields	25
Dover Hoverport	15
Edinburgh	15
Poole	10
Aberdeen	10
Belfast	5
Bristol	5
Plymouth	5
Liverpool	5
Southampton	5
Swansea	5
Folkestone	5
Leeds Bradford	*
Norwich	*
Newhaven	*
East Midlands	*
Cardiff	*

[1] Data rounded to multiple of five, (*) = 1 or 2

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers he intends to disperse to clusters in England. [160851]

Mrs. Roche: No firm estimate is available on likely number of dispersals as this is dependant upon a number of factors including the number of applications for asylum and the number of those requesting accommodation as part of an application for support. The National Asylum Support Service has established a National Consultation Group of which every consortium is a member.

Police (Disclosure of Information)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures exist for members of the public to require police forces to disclose information held about them. [161028]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Data Protection Act 1998 (which amended the Data Protection Act 1984) governs procedures in respect of the disclosure of information. Members of the public may exercise their right under this Act by applying to the main police station nearest to where they last lived in this country to make a subject access inquiry. When the application form is completed, this should be sent back to the police together with any accompanying documents that are required and a £10 fee for each category of information that they wish to access. The police are then under a legal requirement to respond to their inquiries within 40 days.

Currently, legislation relates to computer-based records only until the new Act takes effect from 24 October 2001 when structured manual files are also included. Applications to make a subject access request can be obtained from all major police stations or by contacting the relevant force's Data Protection Officer.

Covert Filming

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has *(a)* to deal with and *(b)* to prevent harassment by covert filming. [161027]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There are no specific provisions covering harassment by covert filming. A course of conduct causing another person harassment, alarm or distress is an offence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. The Act also provides for a second offence of causing someone to fear on two or more occasions that violence will be used against them. The courts can impose on anyone convicted of either of these two offences a restraining order preventing further harassment or fear of violence. A breach of such an order is a serious matter, and attracts a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment. The Act also provides for a civil order, a breach of which is a criminal offence.

Fasting (Prisons)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to intervene in respect of a person in custody in one of Her Majesty's prisons who is seeking to fast to death; and what guidance he has issued to *(a)* prison officers and *(b)* others in respect of the exercise of such powers. [161023]

Mr. Boateng: The Prison Service has a duty of care but compulsory treatment may be provided only in certain circumstances. Generally, prisoners who are assessed to be of sound mind, who have no evidence of mental illness, and who fully understand the consequences of their actions, cannot be treated compulsorily and therefore cannot usually be fed artificially against their will by prison authorities. In such situations, some prisoners may, in consultation with their legal advisers, make directives to the effect that they do not wish for medical intervention in the event of a deterioration in their well-being. However, even where advance directives have been made, all aspects of prisoners' conditions are reviewed, including mental capacity and well-being. They are reminded of the consequences of their actions should they wish to continue to refuse food.

The Prison Service issued detailed guidance to prison doctors, in January 1996, on the subject of food refusal, which discussed the question of mental capacity and the implications of advance directives.

Police Complaints (Northamptonshire)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Northamptonshire about the investigation of a complaint by a constituent whose name has been forwarded to him. [161029]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I understand from the chief constable of Northamptonshire police that in the particular case referred to, no formal complaint has been made. However, I also understand that the allegations have been investigated thoroughly by the Area Commander for the Wellingborough area who has ascertained that they are unfounded.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his role as chair of the Ministerial Committee on the Commonwealth Games. [160728]

Mr. Straw: I chair an ad hoc Ministerial Group which considers Government support to the Commonwealth Games.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office explained, in evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee on 20 March, that Manchester city council, with the Government, had arranged a review of the finances and organisation of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester next year as the build-up to the Games moves from the planning to the implementation phase.

Discussions continue.

Primates

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) of the primates listed in Table 2 of his Department's statistics on the use of animals in scientific procedures for 1999 which came from outside the EU *(a)* how many were wild-caught, *(b)* from which countries were wild-caught primates imported, *(c)* how many were ill or injured on arrival, specifying the illness or injury in each case and *(d)* how many became ill or were injured during quarantine for reasons unrelated to the scientific procedures, specifying the illness or injury in each case; [160894]

(2) of the primates listed in Table 2 of his Department's statistics on the use of animals in scientific procedures for 1999 which came from outside of the EU *(a)* how many were captive-bred, *(b)* from which countries captive-bred primates were imported, *(c)* how many were ill or injured on arrival, specifying the illness or injury in each case and *(d)* how many became ill or were injured during quarantine for reasons unrelated to the scientific procedures, specifying the illness or injury in each case; [160895]

(3) in relation to primates destined for UK laboratories not used for scientific procedures *(a)* how many primates (i) captive-bred and (ii) wild-caught outside the EU were (A) found dead on arrival in the UK and (B) died or became ill in quarantine in (x) 1999 and (y) 2000 in each case giving relevant details. [160917]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We announced in 1997 our intention that licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 will never be issued for programmes of work involving the use of Great Apes (chimpanzees, pygmy chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans) and that exceptional justification is required for the use of wild-caught primates.

In addition, the 1986 Act requires that non-human primates cannot be used unless no other species is suitable. Along with regulatory testing to help ensure the safety of medicines, non-human primates (mainly marmosets and macaques) are also used for other important areas of fundamental research. For example, they contribute to programmes of work relating to Parkinson's disease, visual impairment, stroke, diabetes, disorders of reproduction and vaccine development.

Table 2 of the Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Great Britain 1999 records 418 non-human primates used in scientific procedures as coming from outside the European Union. The detailed information requested in relation to these animals is for the most part not held centrally by the Home Office and it is, therefore, not possible to provide all of the information required about them. However, Home Office records confirm that none of these 418 animals were wild caught.

The overseas sources of primates used in 1999 were Mauritius, the Philippines, China, Israel and South Africa.

I am advised that problems encountered with imported primates are generally few and instances of death following acquisition are very rare.

It is not possible to provide general information with regard to primates destined for laboratories in the United Kingdom but subsequently not used. Such animals are not included in the annual statistics. However, I have previously advised the hon. Member that no deaths or injuries have been reported in baboons during transportation, including the group of twenty-eight wild-caught baboons imported from Kenya in May 1999 but not used.

Departmental Texts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards replacing Anno Domini with Common Era in departmental texts. [160841]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have no such policy, and have not considered introducing one.

May Day Protests

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will reimburse the Metropolitan Police Authority for the additional costs above budget incurred in preparing for and policing the 1 May protests in London; and if he will make a statement; [160918]

(2) what estimates he has made of the additional costs to that for which budget provision exists of the 1 May protests in London. [160919]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Costs of policing operational activities are matters for the police authorities and chief police officers concerned. Such costs are met from the budgets and reserves held by each authority. I have made no estimates of the costs incurred on the 1 May protests.

The additional cost of public order events in London is already partly reflected in a special payment for national and capital city functions which is added to the annual police grant for the Metropolitan Police Authority. The special payment is £191 million in 2001–02.

I am prepared to consider applications from forces for special grant towards extraordinary costs which may be incurred from time to time in exceptional circumstances. The normal criteria for grant are that the event could not reasonably have been anticipated and financial provision made; that the cost is a significant proportion of the force budget; and that having to meet the cost unaided would materially affect the efficiency of the force concerned.

Social Inclusion

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the funding programmes for social inclusion for which his Department is responsible that can be accessed by *(a)* national sports bodies and *(b)* local clubs and communities. [161004]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is shown in the table; all funding is dependent on the body or group concerned meeting the aims of the particular programme:

Programme (Home Office unit concerned)	*Directly accessible by national sports bodies*	*Directly accessible by local clubs and communities*
Connecting Communities (Race Equality Unit)	No	[1]Yes
Family Support Grant "Dads and Lads" parenting programme (Family Policy Unit)	Yes	No
Mentoring Fund (Active Community Unit)	Yes	Yes
Community Resource Fund (Active Community Unit with Community Development Foundation)	No	Yes
Small Bids (to prevent offending) (Youth Justice Board)	Yes	Yes
Mentoring for Ethnic Minorities/Literacy and Numeracy (Youth Justice Board)	No	Yes

[1] Local communities

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to answer the letter to him dated 2 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. J. A. Javed. [160968]

Mr. Straw: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 11 May.

Prison Service Staff

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are employed in the Prison Service *(a)* as (i) prison governors and (ii) assistant governors working in prisons, *(b)* as prison officers working in prisons, *(c)* as support staff working in prisons and *(d)* as (i) prison governors and (ii) assistant governors working in an administrative capacity (I) in his Department and (II) outside individual prisons. [161001]

Mr. Boateng: As at 30 April 2001:

(a) (i) The number of governing governors currently working in establishments was 130.

(ii) The number of other senior operational management staff working in establishments was 774.

(b) The number of prison officers, senior officers and principal officers working in establishments was 23,554.

(c) The number of support staff working in establishments was 17,109.

(d) (i) The number of grade 1 senior operational managers working in an administrative capacity at Prison Service headquarters was 37

(ii) The number of other senior operational managers working in an administrative capacity at Prison Service headquarters was 210.

Additionally, four senior operational managers are currently seconded to other Government Departments and three to other organisations.

TREASURY

Disabled People (Unemployment)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* percentage and *(b)* numerical change in the number of unemployed disabled people was between (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [143372]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 11 May 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question about the percentage and numerical change in the number of unemployed disabled people between May 1997 and the latest available data (143372). I am replying in his absence.

The available data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are on a consistent basis only from spring (March to May) 1998.

Between Spring 1998 and Spring 2000, the number of employed disabled people increased, so that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) unemployment rate for disabled people (the proportion of economically active working age people who are ILO unemployed) fell from 11.3% in Spring 1998 to 10.3% in Spring 2000. During the same period, the number of ILO unemployed people in the UK of working age with a disability increased by 17,000 (4.8%).

This information has been taken from the Labour Force Survey, National Statistics' main source of labour market data on individuals. The LFS identifies whether respondents have a current long-term disability covered by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) or a work-limiting disability. Both categories have been included to give a comprehensive and coherent coverage of disability.

The measure of unemployment derived from the LFS is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the ILO. It counts as unemployed people who are (a) without a paid job, (b) available to start work within the next two weeks, and (c) have either looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained.

Statistics (Northern Region)

Mr. Kemp: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs there were in the economy in the Northern Region *(a)* in 1996 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [155044]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. Fraser Kemp, dated 11 May 2001:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question about the number of jobs in the Northern region in 1996 and for the most recent period for which data are available (155044). I am replying in his absence.

Data on jobs are no longer published for the Northern Standard Statistical Region, but they are published quarterly for the North Eastern Government Office Region (GOR) in the Labour Market Statistics First Release for the North East region. These data may be accessed via the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Tax Credit Fraud

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 154W, on tax credit fraud, if he will break down by *(a)* type of offence involved and *(b)* occupational group, the (i) penalties and (ii) prosecutions. [157873]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Information on penalties is available only for the most recent 164 cases. Prior to that date, the information was held clerically and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Information as to the occupation group is not routinely collected and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The primary reason for applying penalties in each of the 164 cases is given in the table.

Penalties	*Number*
Undeclared partner	60
Earnings from self-employment understated	25
Undeclared job	24
Other undeclared income	2
Undeclared or understated savings	21
Undeclared land or property	10
Working insufficient hours	11
False claim for child	5
False claim for child care costs	2
Other	4

Since my reply of 3 April 2001 there has been one additional prosecution in respect of Working Families Tax Credit, bringing the total to 16. The offences are given in the following table. The total number of offences is more than 16 as some individuals are prosecuted for more than one offence.

Offences	*Number*
False accounting	9
Theft	6
Going equipped to cheat	2
Conspiracy	2
Fraud	2
Deception	1

The occupation groups of the 16 individuals are given in the table.

Occupation groups	*Number*
Managerial and administrators	2
Associate professional and technical occupations	1
Clerical and secretarial occupations	3
Personal and protective services	3
Sales occupations	2
Unemployed	5

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many one earner couples are on the Children's Tax Credit taper or above Children's Tax Credit entitlements who would be entitled if their income was divided equally between them as a two earner couple; [158696]

(2) how many families are expected to *(a)* receive the full Children's Tax Credit, *(b)* receive a partial Children's Tax Credit because their income is too low to receive a full credit and *(c)* receive a partial Children's Tax Credit because their income is too high to receive a full credit; [158712]

(3) how many families are *(a)* on the Children's Tax Credit taper and *(b)* ineligible for the Children's Tax Credit because their earnings are above the threshold for entitlement; and how many of these are (i) one-earner couples, (ii) two-earner couples and (iii) single parents. [158688]

Dawn Primarolo: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many recipients of the Children's Tax Credit have, as a result, had a reduction in their entitlement to *(a)* Housing Benefit, *(b)* Council Tax Benefit, *(c)* Working Families Tax Credit, *(d)* Disabled Persons Tax Credit and *(e)* other benefits. [158711]

Dawn Primarolo: Information is not available on the number of rewards reviewed since 5 April. People who are claiming Children's Tax Credit, and also the Working Families Tax Credit or Disabled Person's Tax Credit, will have their award increased from June when they re-apply so that they will receive the full benefit of the Children's Tax Credit.

Helplines

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159508]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is as follows:

HM Treasury

Full details may be found on the website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Inland Revenue

A full list can be found on the Inland Revenue website at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk.

Customs and Excise

National Advice Service 0845 010 9000 8 am to 8 pm Monday to Friday. (There is a dedicated line for Welsh speakers and a textphone line.) This deals with Customs/VAT and other taxes like Insurance Premium Tax.

Customs Confidential 0800 59 5000 24 hours a day seven days a week. (To report smuggling and fraud.)

National Insolvency Helpdesk 0151 703 8711/8450 8.30 am to 5 pm Monday to Thursday, 8.30 am to 4 pm Friday.

Tariff Classification 01702 366 077 9 am to 4.30 pm Monday to Friday. (To obtain commodity codes for imported goods.)

Trade Statistics 01702 367 485 10 am to 4 pm Monday to Friday. (Statistics on imports.)

Office for National Statistics

The ONS helplines are listed on the "contacts" pages of the National Statistics website at www.statistics.gov.uk (actual page address http.//statbase/email.asp).

Debt Management Office

Full details on the website at www.dmo.gov.uk.

Office of Government Commerce

Full details on the website at www.ogc.gov.uk.

Royal Mint

The Royal Mint does not provide a "service to the citizen" as with most mainstream Government Departments; they do provide a dedicated telephone inquiry and helpline for Coin Club customers. In addition, the Information Office is charged with assisting members of the general public with their coinage inquiries. Both telephone numbers are published.

Government Actuaries Department

Full details may be found on the GAD website at www.gad.gov.uk.

National Savings

Full details may be found on the website at www.nationalsavings.co.uk.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses have been given additional funding to ease cash flow difficulties caused by the payment of Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Persons Tax Credit in each quarter. [159699]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Employers whose prospective payments of tax credits in any period (up to six months) exceed the PAYE tax, national insurance contributions and student loan deductions they expect to deduct in the same period can apply for the additional funding required. The numbers of employers receiving funding in each quarter were as follows.

Quarter	*Number*
April to June 2000	10,000
July to September 2000	20,000
October to December 2000	30,000
January to March 2001	30,000

Customs and Excise

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when guidelines on the handling of informants were last revised; and what factors underlay the changes made; [160387]

(2) how much has been paid in total to informants in each of the last 10 years; and if he will list the number of payments made to informants within the ranges *(a)* £1,000-£9,000, *(b)* £10,000-£49,000, *(c)* £50,000-£99,000 and *(d)* £100,000 and over. [160371]

Dawn Primarolo: The guidelines for handling informants were last revised in October 2000 as a result of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. It is not Customs' policy to disclose information about the amounts paid to informants on the ground that this could undermine the effectiveness of law enforcement.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many Customs and Excise officers are suspended; and in which *(a)* divisions and *(b)* regions of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise they work; [160370]

(2) who is conducting the investigation into Peter Robinson; and if he will make a statement; [160385]

(3) how many Customs and Excise officers have been arrested in the last six years; how many of them have been charged; and with what offences. [160384]

Dawn Primarolo: Information relating to Customs officers who have been arrested is not held centrally. The other information sought by my hon. Friend cannot be provided, in accordance with exemptions 4 and 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what investigations are planned into the activities of *(a)* John Haase, *(b)* Paul Bennett and *(c)* their handlers; [160386]

(2) when *(a)* Paul Bennett and *(b)* John Haase ceased to be registered informants; [160373]

(3) what reviews have been made of the convictions contingent upon the evidence of John Haase and Paul Bennett. [160388]

Dawn Primarolo: The persons named have not given evidence in any Customs prosecution. As a result of a joint customs/police investigation John Haase is now serving 13 years for his part in a conspiracy to supply drugs and guns. No further investigations are planned. It is not policy to confirm or deny whether any person is or has been an informant.

Drugs

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases involving the import of drugs were *(a)* successfully prosecuted, *(b)* summarily dismissed by the court and *(c)* unsuccessfully prosecuted in the last year. [160372]

Dawn Primarolo: Most recent available information is for the financial year 1999–2000. Customs successfully prosecuted 884 drugs cases. 29 cases were dismissed prior to a jury decision and 69 cases resulted in no conviction.

National Insurance

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in contracted out money purchase pension schemes are owed outstanding national insurance contribution rebates; how much these rebates are worth in total; and when the Government expect to have paid the outstanding rebates. [160228]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* There are approximately 2,800 people in contracted out money purchase schemes owed NI rebates for 1999–2000. The rebates are worth approximately £700K. We will pay the rebates when we receive and process a correctly completed end of year return from the employer.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much compensation the Government expect to pay out in the current financial year to people who are owed national insurance contribution rebates. [160226]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The estimated compensation costs for 2001–02 cannot yet be quantified.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people with personal pensions are owed outstanding national insurance contribution payments; how much these rebates are worth in total; and when the Government expect to have paid the outstanding rebates. [160227]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* There are approximately 67,000 people with personal pensions owed NI rebates for 1999–2000. The rebates are worth approximately £29.1 million. We will pay the rebates when we receive and process a correctly completed end of year return from the employer.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have received outstanding national insurance contribution rebates; what is the average length of time people have had to wait to receive outstanding rebates; and what the average compensation paid to people owed outstanding rebates is. [160229]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* For the 1999–2000 tax year, it is estimated that approximately 4.5 million people have received a NI rebate. There is no estimate of the average length of time people have had to wait or of the average compensation paid.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many married women who previously chose to pay reduced national insurance contributions have opted to pay the full contributions in each year since 1997; and how much last year's information campaign aimed at these women cost. [160232]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* An estimate of the number of women opting to pay full-rate contributions in the years identified, based on a 3 per cent. sample of our records is:

	Number
6 April 1997 to 5 April 1998	17,200
6 April 1998 to 5 April 1999	14,700
6 April 1999 to 5 April 2000	4,800
6 April 2000 to 5 April 2001	3,300

The Mailshot and publicity prompted a number of women to request state retirement pension forecasts. We dealt with 35,314 requests between 2 October 2000 and 5 March 2001. As of 5 March 2001, we have issued 20,959 actual forecasts.

The cost of the campaign was approximately £32,000.

Pensioners

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to monitor the take-up of age-related personal allowances by pensioners completing the latest self assessment forms. [160248]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue asks taxpayers to state their date of birth on the self assessment form. The age related personal allowance will then be given depending on their income.

Tax Returns

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individual taxpayers who file self-assessment tax returns have registered for the Inland Revenue service for filing tax returns on the internet in each month since the service became available; and if he will make a statement. [160118]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Since the registration service became available on 3 April 2000, 134,550 individual taxpayers who file self assessment tax returns have registered for the Inland Revenue service for filing tax returns over the internet. The numbers of registrations in each month were given in my answer to the hon. Member on 18 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 110W. The updated figures are as follows:

Month	Registrations	Cumulative total
August 2000	11,700	81,894
September 2000	16,557	98,451
October 2000	2,736	101,187
November 2000	1,697	102,884
December 2000	2,902	105,786
January 2001	14,162	119,948
February 2001	595	120,543
March 2001	522	121,065
April 2001	13,485	134,550

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individual taxpayers who file self-assessment tax returns and have registered for the Inland Revenue service for filing tax returns on the internet have submitted their tax returns using the internet-based service in each month since the service became available; and if he will make a statement. [160117]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Since the facility to submit tax returns over the internet became available on 3 July 2000, 40,299 tax returns have been received over the internet from individual taxpayers who file self assessment tax returns. The number of submissions in each month were as follows:

Month	Returns submitted	Cumulative total
2000		
July	7,321	7,321
August	6,630	13,951
September	9,419	23,370
October	2,544	25,914
November	1,165	27,079
December	1,412	28,491
2001		
January	9,694	38,185
February	973	39,158
March	122	39,280
April	1,019	40,299

Fluoride Toothpaste

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the benefits of introducing a VAT zero rate on fluoride toothpaste. [160348]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* There are no plans to extend the existing VAT relief to include fluoride toothpaste. Price is not considered to be a disincentive to the use of fluoride rather than non-fluoride toothpastes.

European Insurance Directive

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the European Commission over compliance by Lloyd's with European Insurance Directive 73/239. [160402]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* Treasury Ministers have had no discussions with the European Commission over compliance by Lloyd's with European Insurance Directive 73/239.

Cross-border Smuggling

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the income through taxation being lost as a result of cross-border smuggling into Northern Ireland of petroleum fuel and related products. [160337]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) on 21 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 234W.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement regarding the impact of advanced corporation tax credits on Scottish pensioners. [159297]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 May 2001]:* The Government's package of corporation tax reforms included not only the withdrawal of payable tax credits, but also cuts in corporation tax rates. The withdrawal of payable credits removed a distortion in the tax system which encouraged companies to pay out their profits as dividends, rather than retain them for reinvestment in the business. These and other measures help to improve investment performance. The effect of these changes on the size of UK pension funds varies depending upon many factors, such as the type of scheme; the take-up of private pensions; the level of future contributions and the investment policy adopted by fund managers.

SERCO Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the contracts that exist between SERCO and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151351]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information is as follows:

Department	*Current contracts with SERCO*	*Contracts with SERCO over the last three years*
HM Treasury	None	None
Inland Revenue	1. Contract for the provision of off-site records management for IR offices at Nottingham	1. Remote typing services for IR East Region 2. Typing, secretarial and administration services at IR offices in Nottingham
HM Customs and Excise	1. Provision of works manager services by way of a call-off contract to C&E offices in the South East (in existence throughout previous 3 years) 2. Supply, installation and maintenance automatic number plate readers.	
The Office for National Statistics	None	1. July 1998—Consultancy services (installation of air conditioning) 2. January 1999—(minor works to server rooms)
Office of Government Commerce	None	None
PACE	None	None
TBA	None	None
CCTA	SERCO have been a contractor in the CCTA managed S-Cat Catalogue	

Census

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many callers to the Census Helpline have been asked to call back later; [158819]

(2) for what reason the Census Helpline does not permit callers to hold when operators are busy. [158818]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Nick Gibb, dated 11 May 2001:

The Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent questions asking about callers to the Census Helpline (158818 and 158819). I am replying in his absence.

The Helpline was operational from 1 April and to date more than 2 million calls have been received, with 240,000 calls received on 23 April alone. In comparison, in 1991 only 125,000 calls were received by the Helpline before Census day and a further 85,000 calls after it.

Because of this unprecedented level of response in such a short period it has been necessary for the Helpline to advise callers to call back at a time that may be less busy rather than to hold. This was a significant problem for two days, however over 99 per cent. of calls are now getting through.

In a move to ensure that everybody has a form and to further improve the service:

> A separate number was introduced for those who wish to request a form (500 lines);
>
> All other queries have been dealt with on the existing helpline number and the number of telephone lines was increased to 1000. With the additional operators, many more callers were able to pose questions not covered by the extensive range of recorded messages.

Information on the numbers of callers who have been asked to call back is not available.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the combined cost of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160056]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Family Statistics

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of *(a)* families with dependent children are headed by (i) married couples, (ii) cohabiting couples and (iii) a lone parent by each type and *(b)* dependent children live in families which are headed by (1) a married couple, (2) a cohabiting couple, (3) a parent who has never married, (4) a widowed parent, (5) a divorced parent and (6) a separated parent. [160734]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Edward Leigh, dated 11 May 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question about dependent children and the marital status of heads of families. (160734).

Estimates of marital status and household composition are available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) household datasets, which are available for the spring and autumn quarters of each year. The latest available LFS estimates of the marital status of heads of households are for the autumn (September to November) quarter of 2000 and are given in the following tables.

The first table gives non-seasonally adjusted LFS estimates of families with dependent children by the marital status of the head of the family unit; the second gives estimates of dependent children by the marital status of the head of the family unit.

Table 1: Families with dependent children[1] by marital status of head of family: United Kingdom, autumn 2000; not seasonally adjusted

	Percentage
Percentage of which headed by:	
Married couple	67.3
Cohabiting couple	10.8
Male lone parents	2.3
Female lone parents	19.7
All families with dependent children = 100 per cent.	7,400,000

[1] Dependent children are defined as all 0–15 year olds and 16–18 year olds in full-time education.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Table 2: Dependent children[1] by marital status of head of family: United Kingdom, autumn 2000; not seasonally adjusted

	Percentage
Percentage of dependent children in families headed by:	
Married couple	70.7
Cohabiting couple	9.5
Single parent, never married	7.2
Widowed parent	1.2
Divorced parent	6.5
Separated parent	5.0
Dependent children in all family units = 100 per cent.	14,463,000

[1] Dependent children are defined as all 0–15 year olds and 16–18 year olds in full-time education.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the questions from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton which were tabled on 25 April 2001 (ref 158818, 158819). [160921]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have already done so.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mortality rates are for *(a)* those aged between 55 to 60 years and *(b)* those aged 60 years, broken down by (i) social class, (ii) sex and (iii) socio-economic ranking. [161050]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This is a matter for the National Statistician, whom I have asked to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Tax Law Rewrite

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what progress has been achieved by the tax law rewrite project in the last year; and what plans it has for the coming year. [161124]

Dawn Primarolo: I am pleased to announce that the Tax Law Rewrite project has continued to make excellent progress in the past 12 months. The Inland Revenue will shortly publish a report which reviews the recent progress of the project and outlines its work programme for the current year.

The Capital Allowances Act 2001, the project's first Act, became law in April. This is a major achievement and one that has been warmly welcomed by the main users of tax law. The tax community is keen that the project should continue and looks forward to further rewritten legislation in the future.

Valuation Office Agency

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if a revised framework document for the Valuation Office Agency is available. [161123]

Dawn Primarolo: A Revised Framework Document for the Valuation Office Agency has now been drawn up, incorporating the recommendations of the recent 5-yearly review. It is available on the Inland Revenue's website at *www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk*, together with the report of the review which was published on 13 Septemeber 2000. Copies of the Revised Framework Document are also being placed in the House Libraries.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Buy British Initiatives

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department is taking in respect of Buy British initiatives consequent on the foot and mouth outbreak. [160502]

Ms Hewitt: British Trade International are working with MAFF and the Foreign Office and Food for Britain to ensure foreign markets for British food products remain open whenever possible. An additional £18 million has been provided by DCMS to the British Tourist Authority and English Tourism Council to help promote tourism in domestic and overseas markets.

Efforts by rural businesses to strengthen the marketing of their products may also be eligible for support under the £50 million rural business recovery fund to be managed by RDAs which was announced on Monday 7 May. The Small Business Service telephone helpline is also providing advice to businesses affected by foot and mouth disease which may include assistance on marketing and the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme has been extended to help rural businesses suffering cash flow problems.

Liquid Petroleum Gas

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average price of LPG was *(a)* overall, *(b)* in rural areas and *(c)* in urban areas in each of the last three years. [160907]

Mr. Hain: The average price paid for LPG by manufacturing industry in Great Britain is published regularly in the DTI publication "Energy Trends". No additional breakdown is available for rural and urban prices. Average prices for each of the last three years are as follows:

Average price of LPG purchased by manufacturing industry in Great Britain[1]

	£ per tonne
1998	151.3
1999	144.4
2000[2]	236.0

[1] Figures are based on the results of a survey of manufacturing industry in Great Britain. They do not include LPG used for transport purposes.

[2] The figure for 2000 is provisional

Source:

DTI

Fossil Fuels

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much his Department has spent on research into the use of *(a)* LPG, *(b)* hydrogen and *(c)* electricity as an alternative to fossil fuels in each of the last five years. [160912]

Mr. Hain: Liquid petroleum gas (LPG) has been available in the market for a long time and the technology involved is well developed. The Government have not viewed it as appropriate to carry out their own research programme into LPG.

Over the past five years, the DTI has provided support averaging some £1 million per year for research on fuel cells, which could provide a major application for hydrogen in the medium term. The DTI is currently reviewing hydrogen research, and a report has been commissioned.

It is unclear what the hon. Member intends by his reference to research on the use of electricity as an alternative to fossil fuels, since of course electricity can be generated from both fossil fuels and other fuels such as renewable energy. My recent announcement of £55.5 million funding for R&D on renewables over the next three years represents a substantial boost for renewables R&D, as part of the Government's £260 million wide-ranging package of incentives for renewable energy.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the additional sums to promote the development of new sources of renewable energy announced in the 2000 Spending Review has been spent to date; on what schemes; and what plans he has for the remaining sums. [160913]

Mr. Hain: The new money announced in the 2000 Spending Review and the other new funding for renewable energy, comprising a total package in excess of £250 million, relates to the three year period 2001–04.

The package includes £89 million for capital grants for offshore wind, energy crops and biomass generation; £55.5 million for an expanded DTI R&D programme; £12 million from MAFF for their energy crops planting scheme; an initial £10 million as the first phase of a market stimulation programme for photovoltaic roofs; £3 million investment in a solar housing trial; and £100 million to be allocated later in the year.

My Department is working in consultation with the wind energy industry on detailed arrangements for the new capital grants scheme for offshore wind energy projects. The New Opportunities Fund will be consulting the biomass industry and other interested parties on the details of the energy crops electricity generation and small-scale biomass heating schemes.

The precise allocation of the £100 million announced by the Prime Minister for different renewable technologies will be decided in the light of recommendations of the Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit later in the year. The Prime Minister indicated that this new money will help promote solar photovoltaics, give a boost to offshore wind, kick start energy crops and bring on stream other new generation technologies.

Decisions on the allocation of the DTI's increased R&D budget for renewable energy will be made in the light of consultation with industry and the universities. Of the £18 million available for renewables R&D in the current financial year, some £8 million has already been allocated to a range of renewable energy projects.

Telecommunications (Gibraltar)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has made (1) in the European Union Council of Ministers to press Spain to recognise Gibraltar's international dialling code; [160929]

(2) to the European Union competition authorities regarding the handling of internationally dialled telephone calls routed through Spain destined for Gibraltar; and what plans Her Majesty's Government have to take legal action against the Government of Spain in respect of the effect on the Gibraltar economy of Spain's actions with the intention of seeking financial compensation; [160930]

(3) to the European Union competition authorities to ensure that the competition cases relating to the handling of internationally dialled telephone calls routed through Spain destined for Gibraltar are processed speedily; and what plans Her Majesty's Government have to take legal action against the Spanish Government in respect of their instruction to mobile telephone operators not to sign roaming agreements with the Gibraltar mobile telephone company. [160931]

Ms Hewitt: HMG are deeply concerned about the problems which Gibraltar is experiencing, including the issue of the handling of internationally dialled, least-cost routed telephone calls destined for Gibraltar, and we are pressing the European Commission and the Spanish Government for an early resolution.

The European Commission, which under the EC Treaty has the primary responsibility for upholding Community Law, is considering two private competition complaints relating to these problems, one of which concerns mobile roaming. HMG are in frequent contact with the Commission on this matter and have made it clear that they support these complaints.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make representations to the Council of Ministers to press Spain to recognise Gibraltar's international dialling code; [161038]

(2) if he will take action to stop the Spanish Government instructing Spanish mobile telephone companies not to sign roving agreements with the Gibraltar mobile telephone companies. [161034]

Ms Hewitt: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin) by my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160881]

Dr. Howells: This information is held at local management level and is not readily available centrally.

Departmental Staff Numbers

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the reason was for the increase in his Department's staff numbers between 1996–97 and 2001. [161126]

Mr. Byers: The figures published in the DTI's March Expenditure Plans Report show DTI actual staff numbers of 9,640 in 1996–97 and an estimated figure of 10,324 for 2000–01 . This represents an increase of 684 staff (or 7 per cent.) over four years, principally reflecting caseload increases in demand-led activities:

ACAS, a Non-Departmental Public Body which by convention counts towards DTI's staff numbers although it is not part of DTI. Staff numbers have increased by 210 (or 34 per cent.) from 614 in 1996–97 to 824 in 2000–01. Over the same period, caseloads have increased significantly with the number of individual conciliation cases received—one of ACAS's principal activities—rising by 45 per cent. from 77,481 to an estimated 112,000 and the number of inquiries handled growing by 71 per cent. from 439,943 to an estimated 753,000.

The Employment Tribunal Service, a DTI agency. Staff have increased by 91 (or 15 per cent.) from 621 in 1996–97 to 712 in 2000–01. Over the same period, employment tribunal applications rose by 46 per cent. from 88,910 to an estimated 130,000.

The Patent Office, a Trading Fund agency which meets all its outgoings from receipts. Staff numbers have increased by 167 (or 23 per cent.) from 729 in 1996–97 to 896 in 2000–01. Over the same period, caseloads in the agency's main areas of work grew significantly. Between the calendar years 1996 and 2000, patent applications increased by 15.7 per cent. from 27,143 to 31,412 while trade mark applications (including for additional classes) rose by 41.2 per cent. from 71,463 to 100,902.

In addition, smaller increases have occurred at two other DTI agencies: the Insolvency Service (35 staff, about 2 per cent.) and Companies House (34 staff, about 4 per cent.).

Nearly all of the remainder is accounted for by an increase of 141 staff across the Department's headquarters and central services and the Small Business Service. The paybill has fallen by 4.6 per cent. in real terms between 1996–97 and the estimate for 2000–01, from £239 million in 1996–97 to £251 million estimated for 2000–01.

MOX Fuels

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the assessment his Department made of the BNFL economic case for the Sellafield MOX Plant, on which the departmental letter of endorsement included in the current public consultation documentation is based. [161120]

Mr. Hain: The Department endorsed on 22 March the second MOX market review prepared by BNFL for DETR. As noted in the consultation document published by DETR and the Department of Health on 28 March, the Department took into account advice from the FCO on the content of that market review, since it related to the major overseas customers who have had plutonium separated from spent fuel at Sellafield. That FCO advice is available from DETR as part of the consultation process.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has received from the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission in respect of proposals to use United Kingdom-origin plutonium in United States lead test assemblies for MOX plutonium-based fuels. [161119]

Mr. Hain: The Department is aware that the official transcript of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission for 2 February referred to such a proposal, which has also been reported in the specialist media. We understand this option was being considered by the US Administration. The Government have not been formally approached by the US Administration about the matter.

Post Offices

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* sub-post offices and *(b)* Crown offices closed in each quarter of the last financial year. [160716]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 May 2001]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

Icelandic-water Trawlermen

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many payments under the compensation scheme for former trawlermen who fished in Icelandic waters have been made; what has been the average payment; how many applications for such payments have been turned down; how many have subsequently been paid following a successful appeal; and if he will make a statement. [159710]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* The most recent figures show 1,286 payments have been made under the compensation scheme and the average payment made has been £11,993. A total of 289 claims have been rejected and a further 2,173 duplicate claims have been identified.

To date there have only been four formal appeals and they have been unsuccessful.

British Coal (Former Employees)

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department is taking to help identify former British Coal canteen workers and cleaners in order that they may receive their equal pay compensation awards. [161068]

Mr. Hain: Former British Coal canteen workers and cleaners eligible to receive an award are already identified. They are those whose claims were lodged with the Employment Tribunal by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in the period 1985–1992.

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former canteen workers and cleaners of British Coal have been identified as qualifying for an equal pay award under the recently resolved agreement. [161069]

Mr. Hain: There are 1,327 former British Coal canteen workers and cleaners whose equal value claim was lodged with the Employment Tribunal by the National Union of Mineworkers in the period 1985–92 who qualify for an award.

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects former canteen workers and cleaners of British Coal to receive their recently agreed award for compensation under the equal pay agreement. [161067]

Mr. Hain: Former British Coal canteen workers and cleaners should receive payment within a week of formal notification of their claims being withdrawn from the Employment Tribunal.

I expect first payments to be made at the end of May.

Employment Tribunals

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the results of the consultations carried out last year on the proposals to change employment tribunal cost rules. [161043]

Mr. Alan Johnson: My officials held informal discussions with a range of organisations last year concerning employment tribunal rules of procedure. I have no plans to publish the outcome of those discussions.

Miners' Compensation

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average amount of compensation paid to former miners is for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* emphysema. [161016]

Mr. Hain: With regards to vibration white finger, the Department is not yet able to make full and final offers in many cases as there are some elements of compensation (for example, claims for loss of services) that still have to be agreed with the miners' solicitors. However, interim payments are made in the meantime in respect of general damages. The average payment after medical assessment is £6,828. The average payment across all full and final and interim payments is £5,790.

In relation to compensation for respiratory disease, the average settlement is £4,982. However, this mainly reflects Expedited Offers paid on the basis of spirometry results which account for the large majority of settlements to date.

There have been 5,025 interim payments made, averaging £3,000 based on spirometry results. The Department has also paid 5,521 bereavement awards, averaging £8,200 and 14,764 payments of £2,000 to claimants who have received Industrial Injuries Benefit for Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema. The average payment across all full and final payments and interim payments is £3,914.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners have received compensation for *(a)* vibration white finger and *(b)* emphysema. [161017]

Mr. Hain: The Department has made 47,253 individual payments, including interims and full and final payments, in respect of vibration white finger, totalling £273.6 million.

In respect of respiratory disease, 31,188 individual payments, including interims and full and final settlements, have been paid to former miners, totalling £98.2 million. In addition, there have been 5,521 bereavement awards totalling £45.5 million.

Industrial Diseases

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will recognise emphysema and chronic bronchitis as industrial diseases. [161106]

Mr. Hain: In January 1998 my Department assumed responsibility for the former British Coal's health liabilities, which include both emphysema and chronic bronchitis, and since then we have paid out over £146 million in compensation.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Radio Licences

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when applications for the last remaining digital radio licence in London will be determined; and if religious organisations will have equal consideration to other applicants. [159273]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Dissolution. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether applications for the last digital radio licence available for London will be determined prior to a change in the law; [161128]

(2) under what circumstances radio stations can obtain automatic renewal of their analogue licences by applying for a digital licence; [161129]

(3) what the Government's policy is on granting an automatic renewal of Premier's analogue licence. [161130]

Janet Anderson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Dissolution. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Export Licences

Mr. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the standard time is for turning round export licence applications made to his Department. [160791]

Mr. Alan Howarth: My Department's export licensing unit has a code of practice under which the unit aims to issue export licences within five working days of receiving the application. Unfortunately, they cannot do so if any information is missing from the application or if it needs to be referred to an expert adviser in a museum or gallery. Expert advisers will normally be consulted within five working days and they are asked to respond to the unit within 15 working days.

If there is a particular urgency with an application, the unit will try to issue a licence by the deadline requested.

Manpower

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many meetings Ministers attended with Manpower to discuss the Millennium Dome. [160657]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* According to my Department's records, neither I nor my Ministers have attended meetings with Manpower to discuss the millennium dome. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), the Minister without Portfolio, held one meeting with Manpower in April 1998. His successor as shareholder, Lord Falconer, met Manpower in June 1999 and January 2000. It was normal practice for the shareholder to be kept informed of progress on issues surrounding the Millennium Experience, including progress on the zones in which the sponsors had an interest.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of senior grade civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160891]

Mr. Chris Smith: No senior civil servants in this Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week. Hours being worked by all staff are monitored through an annual survey.

Departmental Policies (Glasgow, Pollok)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Glasgow, Pollok constituency, the effects on Glasgow, Pollok of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [160832]

Mr. Chris Smith: Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future.

The Government have also introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year. Information on the number of beneficiaries by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 census indicate that there were approximately 5,200 people aged 75 or over living in the Glasgow, Pollok constituency.

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 76 national lottery awards to Glasgow, Pollok, totalling £2,268,974, since 2 May 1997. 38 millennium award winners have been identified from Glasgow, Pollok and between them they have received grants totalling £107,947. There have been no specific awards to Glasgow, Pollok from the millennium festival, however, Glasgow as a whole did receive grants totalling £546,000 for the New Year's Eve celebrations.

Other functions which were the responsibility of my Department have been devolved in Scotland to the Scottish Executive.

Walsall (Funding)

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding has been made available to the borough of Walsall by his Department since June 1997. [160998]

Mr. Chris Smith: Most of the Department's funding is allocated through its non-departmental public bodies such as the Arts Council of England, Sport England and English Heritage. Information about what they fund can be obtained from those bodies.

My Department has given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure, doubling the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for arts. This includes the following schemes:

Space for Sport and Arts Scheme

Under the Space for Sport and Arts (SSA) scheme, a £130 million capital programme made up of £75 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund and £55 million from Sport England, the Arts Council of England and the third round of the New Opportunities Fund, Walsall local education authority has been allocated up to £1.25 million towards providing improved facilities for sport and arts in primary schools which can also be used by the wider community. Of the three schemes proposed in Walsall, one is in Walsall, South and the other two in Walsall, North.

Creative Partnerships

In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport, £40 million has been allocated to developing creative partnerships. On 21 February, I announced the 16 areas in which it is hoped creative partnership pilots will be developed. The Black Country is one of these areas, including Walsall. The Arts Council of England, which is delivering the initiative, will be consulting schools and creative organisations in each location over the next few months to establish which bodies and schools will be involved. Details on how schools and cultural organisations can take part in creative partnerships will be available from the Arts Council shortly. Funding for the initiative will come on stream in April 2002.

School Sports Co-ordinators

School Sport Co-ordinators will be based in families of schools, in areas of greatest need, linked wherever possible through local education authorities to specialist sports colleges. They will provide opportunities for young people to compete regularly for their school and take part in a wide range of sports. By 2004, there will be about 250 families established with 1,000 secondary schools and up to 6,000 primary schools benefiting directly from this programme. Walsall has been awarded £407,542 in the second round of awards. There are six school sport co-ordinators in Aldridge-Brownhills, 30 primary teachers and one partnership development manager.

DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund

The borough of Walsall received awards of £82,000 in 1997–98, £2,000 in 1999–2000 and £149,645 in 2000–01.

Social Inclusion

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the funding programmes for social inclusion for which his Department is responsible that can be accessed by *(a)* national sports bodies and *(b)* local clubs and communities. [161003]

Kate Hoey: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Dissolution. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Premiere

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Government's policy is on granting an automatic renewal of Premiere's analogue licence. [160937]

Janet Anderson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Dissolution. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

BBC

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make representations to the BBC to transmit *(a)* BBC Online and *(b)* Westminster Live in ADSL broadband. [161056]

Janet Anderson: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Dissolution. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Listed Buildings

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if English Heritage's Grant Aid Budget for privately-owned Grade I and II* listed buildings will remain unchanged in the current year; and what plans it has to alter the balance of funding between such buildings and those owned by English Heritage. [161042]

Mr. Alan Howarth: English Heritage's (EH) Strategic Plan indicates that they currently plan to offer £12.3 million in Grant Aid to privately owned Grade I and II* listed buildings in this financial year, and the same amount in each of the next two years ie 2002–03 and 2003–04 respectively.

The outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) has had an adverse impact on revenue from EH's historic properties and sites that are open to the public. Consequently, all aspects of the organisation's 2001–02 budget are currently under review. It is too early to predict the full impact of FMD on EH and firm decisions about budget allocations have yet to be taken. It is for EH to decide on grant allocations within the resources available to them.

Union Flag

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he will take to encourage the Union Flag to be flown the correct way up. [161104]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Dissolution. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

WALES

Proportional Representation

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the operation of proportional representation in elections to the National Assembly of Wales. [161036]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The National Assembly for Wales has 40 directly elected constituency Members and 20 additional Members who are elected on the basis of the formula set out in the Government of Wales Act 1998.

This retains local constituencies while giving a strong element of proportional representation to ensure that the membership of the National Assembly reflects more accurately the number of votes cast for each party.

CABINET OFFICE

St. George's Day

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many headquarters buildings of

Government Departments with *(a)* policy and *(b)* funding responsibilities relating to England displayed the Cross of St. George on St. George's Day 2001. [161105]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that it has not been possible to provide an answer before Dissolution. I shall therefore write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Libraries of both Houses.

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95, *(d)* 1995–96, *(e)* 1996–97, *(f)* 1997–98, *(g)* 1998–99, *(h)* 1999–2000 and *(i)* 2000–01, (I) her Department's total spending on quantitative and qualitative surveys of policy issues by focus groups, opinion polling, task forces or other means and (II) the cost of each individual project. [146581]

Marjorie Mowlam: Details of my Department's expenditure on quantitative and qualitative surveys of policy issues since 1997 is listed in the table. Information prior to 1997–98 are not available because the Department's previous accounting systems did not enable expenditure on these services to be identified separately.

I. *Total Expenditure*

(f) 1997–98: £660,826
(g) 1998–99: £281,906
(h) 1999–2000: £190,401
(i) 2000–02: £871,177

II. *Individual Projects*

(f) 1997–98

Description	*Cost (£)*
Research focus group study	2,938
Opening up Quangos—consultation paper	5,234
Evaluation of effectiveness of Charter Mark in improving public service	22,912
Survey assessing effectiveness of Charter Mark promotion public awareness	24,000
Your right to know—consultation for White Paper	33,954
Civil servants' views and experiences on lifelong learning	54,788
Electronic government "The view from the queue"	517,000
Total	660,826

(g) 1998–99

Description	*Cost (£)*
Focus groups—consultation on Citizen's Charter programme	4,700
Research into better government	5,875
GDCA—Customer Satisfaction Survey	6,568
Usage and attitude study of direct access government	8,577
Government websites and the delivery of public services.	18,271
People's Panel—attitudinal opinion survey into public services	237,915
Total	281,906

(h) 1999–2000

Description	*Cost (£)*
People's Panel: Analysis of the views and attitudes of people towards public services	4,500
National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Consultation and Analysis	4,569
Expanded qualitative research into Charter Mark holders	9,000
Research on Neighbourhood Renewal Management for Policy Action Team 4	11,370
Literature review of evidence on the performance of mainstream education services in deprived and non-deprived areas	16,925
GDCA—Customer Satisfaction Survey	17,037
Young people and Gender: A review of research	20,000
National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Consultation with hard to reach groups	21,100
Neighbourhood Statistics Quality Assurance	21,150
Staff attitude survey	25,000
PCSPS 2000 attitude survey	28,000
Total	190,401

(i) 2000–01

Description	*Cost (£)*
Contacting departments/agencies directly re: uptake of qualifications within certain key occupational areas	3,583
Women in ITEC employment	10,000
Establishment of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit	13,105
Parents' perceptions of and attitudes towards government work-life balance initiatives	15,000
To seek views of public on privacy and data sharing	16,500
To seek views of the public on e-government	18,500
Literature and data review of evidence on the performance of mainstream health services in deprived and non-deprived areas	19,600

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Description	*Cost (£)*
Qualitative work on communications issues	23,000
Review of the Policy Action Team Approach to Policy Development	24,990
National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Consultation and Analysis	26,032
Women's individual incomes research	32,145
Research to identify how poor areas changed in the 1990s	33,520
Staff attitude survey	39,285
Crisis management and how the public viewed a crisis	48,410
National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Consultation with hard to reach groups	52,300
People's Panel: Satisfaction with public services and what people expect from them; perceptions about how public services deal with complaints	64,400
People's Panel: Research into what people from ethnic minority communities think of the services they receive and how their opinions differ across and between different ethnic minority groups	68,100
People's Panel: To establish which out-of-hours services people want access to; what sort of business will they want to be able to contact; and how	68,600
Equality in performance review	71,381
Equality in performance review	222,726
Total	871,177

Note:
All figures include recoverable VAT.

Civil Service (Management Functions) Act

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what delegations have been made in 2000 under the Civil Service (Management Functions) Act 1992; to whom these delegations were made; and what the main conditions attached to them were. [146459]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Hope) on 6 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 489W.

Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158556]

Mr. Stringer: A total of five visits were made by the special advisers between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001. In addition the UK anti-drugs co-ordinator and his deputy made a total of 20 visits overseas. These trips abroad, by the UK anti-drugs co-ordinator and his deputy, sometimes included more than one country. All travel complied with the requirements of the civil service management code.

Civil Service Pay

Dr. Marek: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the notional *(a)* minimum and *(b)* maximum salary is for each of the senior five administrative civil service grade pay scales assuming the same pay awards and an averaging of performance related pay for each grade. [160857]

Marjorie Mowlam: In 1996, the senior civil service was created to cover the top 3,000 civil servants formerly in grades 1–5. Members of the senior civil service are placed in one of nine overlapping pay bands broadly according to job weight. Permanent Secretaries have a separate pay range.

The band minima and maxima for 2001–02 are as follows:

		£
	Minimum	*Maximum*
Band 1	44,038	69,178
Band 2	48,552	77,869
Band 3	53,534	87,598
Band 4	59,088	98,494
Band 5	64,768	104,292
Band 6	70,905	110,428
Band 7	77,635	116,904
Band 8	84,811	123,856
Band 9	92,696	131,276
Permanent Secretaries	104,292	179,022

The average individual performance-related award for members of the senior civil service for 2000–01 was 4.8 per cent.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Democratic Republic of Congo

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he will take in response to the UN report on Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [160679]

Mr. Wilson: We have taken careful note of the panel's work so far. We have also supported the extension of the panel's mandate to give it a further opportunity to provide a fully balanced analysis and to include corroborated evidence relating to all parties in the conflict. We now await the panel's final report.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160886]

Mr. Wilson: The Department does not hold central records of those who have voluntarily signed waivers.

India

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Indian authorities concerning the continuing violence and intimidation suffered by Christians in India. [160924]

Mr. Wilson: We have raised our concern over attacks on Christians with the Indian Government on a number of occasions and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Palestinian Authority Prisons

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the number of members of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad released from Palestinian Authority prisons since the start of the current intifada. [160991]

Mr. Wilson: There have certainly been releases, but no reliable figures are available. A few of those released have been rearrested.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 797W, on entry clearance, for what reason a backlog of replies to hon. Members' letters on entry clearance cases accumulated; and what has been the reduction in waiting times since the Minister for Europe assumed responsibility. [158335]

Mr. Vaz: A backlog of replies to right hon. and hon. Members' letters had accumulated due to a shortage of staff in the Visa Correspondence Unit. This has now been addressed. I assumed ministerial responsibility for entry clearance in October 1999. In that month 38 per cent. of letters received from hon. Members were replied to within 15 working days. In March 2001, 92 per cent. were replied to within that period.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if information given to an entry clearance officer during an informal assessment of a visitor's visa application is retained and used in a later fresh application by the same applicant. [160682]

Mr. Vaz: If an applicant decides not to pursue a visit visa application after the preliminary assessment, the visa application form may be retained. If the applicant subsequently lodges a formal application, the interviewing entry clearance officer can consider any evidence relevant to the application when making a decision on the case. The information taken at the pre-assessment stage may be put to the applicant, who would be invited to explain any discrepancies that emerge.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures are in place for an applicant to challenge the contents of an entry clearance officer's notes taken during an informal assessment of the prospects of the award of a visitor visa on the grounds of the applicant's statements being misunderstood. [160697]

Mr. Vaz: The pre-assessment is the procedure whereby an entry clearance officer can give advice to an applicant that their application is unlikely to succeed. The applicant does not have to accept this advice and can proceed with the application at any time. If an applicant therefore believes that his or her statements have been misunderstood during the preliminary assessment, he or she will be given the opportunity to make this clear during the formal visa interview.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the nature of the reduction in the amount of paperwork required from applicants for entry clearance at Islamabad. [160843]

Mr. Vaz: The visa section in Islamabad has recently significantly improved the service they offer. A special exercise conducted in March reduced the non-settlement queue from 42 working days to a same day service and brought all the settlement queues back within the Ministerially agreed targets.

Alongside the special exercise, it was felt that less emphasis should be placed upon the documents submitted with an application when making a decision on the case. Islamabad formerly produced forms which listed in great detail the documents that an applicant should submit with each type of application. Applicants are offered the INF series of visa information leaflets, which clearly explain the Immigration Rules and how to make an application.

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means the EU Association Committee at its meeting in May will assess the compliance of Israel with the human rights clauses within the EU-Israel Association Agreement; and what factors it will take into account. [158806]

Mr. Vaz: The EU and Israel will have a wide ranging discussion at the Association Committee meeting on 21 May. There are no restraints on the dialogue. The EU will be raising issues of concern.

Bahrain

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent EU-Gulf Co-operation Council Ministerial meeting in Bahrain, indicating at what level the United Kingdom was represented and what the outcome was. [160614]

Mr. Vaz: My hon. Friend, the Member for Cunninghame, North, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, attended the EU-Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Joint Council in Manama, Bahrain on 23 April. A copy of the Joint Declaration, covering the issues discussed at the Joint Council, has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Kosovo

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action the

Government are taking to help protect the Serbian Orthodox churches in Kosovo from vandalism and destruction; [160664]

(2) what representations he has received concerning damage to Serbian Orthodox churches in Kosovo. [160665]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* We have received representations from a variety of sources including the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo, MPs and members of the public. The protection of religious and patrimonial sites is an important role for KFOR, undertaken to improve security and the way of life for all communities in Kosovo. KFOR provides armed guards to protect churches and monasteries throughout Kosovo, but unfortunately attacks against churches do still occur.

Turkmenistan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his counterparts in Turkmenistan regarding the imprisonment of Shageldy Atakov; and if he will make a statement. [160714]

Mr. Vaz: On 23 February the British Government, with EU partners and the US, issued a demarche to the Turkmen Foreign Minister regarding reports that Mr. Shageldy Atakov had been beaten and that he was seriously ill, and called for his release on humanitarian grounds. In the absence of a formal response from the Turkmen Foreign Minister, EU and US Ambassadors called on him again on 2 May to press him once more to release Mr. Atakov. The Foreign Minister maintained that as Mr. Atakov refused to ask the Turkmen Government for a pardon he could not be released except under a general amnesty. The Government will continue to press the Turkmen Government for Mr. Atakov's release.

EU Applicants

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the impact on the UK's financial contribution to the EU if the 12 applicant states join, as a result of their membership. [160620]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Following the Berlin European Council in March 1999 the EU agreed indicative limits for expenditure in an enlarged EU until 2006, assuming six new members joining in 2002. The size of any increase in the UK's net contribution would depend upon a number of factors, including the terms of accession, but would be restricted by these limits. Also at Berlin, the governments succeeded in retaining the UK abatement. The abatement will apply to the bulk of spending in the new member states.

Any increase in the UK's net budgetary contribution would also need to be viewed against the considerable political and economic benefits of enlargement.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of increased annual expenditure on the CAP as a result of admitting *(a)* Poland, *(b)* Hungary, *(c)* the Czech Republic, *(d)* Bulgaria and *(e)* Romania into the EU. [160627]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Following the Berlin European Council in March 1999, the EU agreed a Financial Perspective for 2000–06. This contained annual ceilings on agricultural expenditure for the current 15 member states. From 2002 onwards, and for the first time ever, the ceilings on CAP spending in the existing member states decline in real terms.

Berlin also agreed indicative ceilings for expenditure in an enlarged EU, assuming six new members joining in 2002. The exact level of annual expenditure in an enlarged EU will depend upon a number of factors, including the terms of accession, but will be restricted by these limits.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of increased annual expenditure on *(a)* the CAP and *(b)* the total EU budget as a result of admitting the 12 applicant countries negotiating to join the EU. [160621]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* Following the Berlin European Council in March 1999 the EU agreed indicative limits for expenditure in an enlarged EU until 2006, assuming six new members joining in 2002. The exact level of expenditure, overall and on the CAP, will depend upon a number of factors, including the terms of accession, but will be restricted by these limits. These limits leave the overall ceiling on spending in an enlarged EU well beneath the current Own Resources ceiling (1.27 per cent. of community GNP).

Gibraltar

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government will accommodate Gibraltar's telephone system within the UK 0044 code. [160676]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* HMG are deeply concerned at the problems which Gibraltar is currently experiencing over telecommunications. We are considering various options for resolving these problems.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he intends to take legal action against Spain in respect of its instruction to mobile telephone operators not to sign roaming agreements with the Gibraltar Mobile Phone Company; [161087]

(2) what action he has taken following Spain's decision not to recognise Gilbraltar's international dialling code; what assessment he has made of the impact of this decision; and if he will make a statement; [161085]

(3) what representations he has made to the EU competition authorities regarding telecommunications and Gibraltar; [161090]

(4) what compensation he is seeking from Spain for damage to the Gibraltar economy as a result of Spain's decisions on telecommunications policy in respect of Gibraltar; [161088]

(5) what assessment he has made of the combined impact of the use of least cost routing and Spain's decision not to recognise Gibraltar's international dialling code on the Gibraltar economy; [161089]

(6) when Gibraltar exhausted its supply of telephone numbers; and what representations he has made to Spain on this subject. [161086]

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent representations he has made to the EU competition authorities about mobile telephone companies based in Gibraltar; [161037]

(2) what plans he has to take legal action against the Spanish Government relating to its actions on restricting mobile telephone use relating to mobile telephone companies based in Gibraltar. [161039]

Mr. Vaz: HMG are concerned about the various problems which Gibraltar is experiencing over telecommunications. Spain does not recognise Gibraltar's International Direct Dialling code which is recognised by every other country. Gibraltar has now virtually exhausted its numbering capacity.

The European Commission, which under the EC Treaty has primary responsibility for upholding Community Law, including competition law, is considering two private competition complaints relating to Gibraltar telecommunications, one of which concerns mobile roaming. HMG have made it clear that they support these complaints.

The Government of Gibraltar have also brought to our attention problems with Gibraltar-bound international calls failing to reach their destination. We are working hard to identify the exact cause of the problem of dropped calls, and the best way forward.

HMG are in direct contact with the Commission on all these matters. We raise them with the Spanish Government, at both ministerial and official level, at every appropriate opportunity, and will continue to do so.

Syria

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the United Nations security resolutions being contravened by Syria. [160984]

Mr. Wilson: We have a continuing dialogue with Syria about a broad range of United Nations Security Council Resolutions of direct relevance to them, including those concerned with the middle east peace process and Iraq.

Where we have concerns, we continue to seek assurances that Syria is not contravening those resolutions.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the ballistic missile capability of Syria. [160986]

Mr. Wilson: Syria has a combined inventory of several hundred short-range ballistic missiles, with a range of up to 500km. We assess that Syria is also working towards a missile with a range of 700km.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara'a to discuss Syria's support for Hizbollah. [160985]

Mr. Wilson: The Foreign Secretary has no plans to meet the Syrian Foreign Minister, Faruq al-Shara'a before the general election. The Foreign Secretary last spoke to Mr. Shara'a on 18 April welcoming Syria's restraint in response to an Israeli airstrike against a Syrian radar site in Lebanon. The Foreign Secretary urged Syria to use her influence to restrain further Hizbollah attacks across the UN designated "Blue Line".

Iran

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Iranian Foreign Minister to discuss the whereabouts of the Israeli airman, Ron Arad. [160987]

Mr. Wilson: The Foreign Secretary currently has no plans for a meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister, although he has stated that he still hopes to visit Iran later this year. The Iranian Foreign Minister assured him during their meeting in January last year that although he had no information concerning Ron Arad he would pass on any information he might obtain.

Gallipoli (Commemoration)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the nature of the United Kingdom delegation to recent commemorations in Gallipoli. [160840]

Mr. Vaz: The United Kingdom was represented by HM Ambassador in Ankara, Sir David Logan, and the Defence Attaché in Ankara, Brigadier Kim Winfield, at the commemoration of Gallipoli on 24 April.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to answer the letter transferred to him by the Home Secretary dated 12 February from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Ms Denise Southworth. [160964]

Mr. Vaz: This letter has not been transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The subject is a matter for HM Customs and Excise.

Missile Defence

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has from the United States Administration on the scope and degree of consultation the United States *(a)* has had and *(b)* intends to have, with the Governments of the Group of 77 in respect of proposals for global deployment of missile defence systems. [160804]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 10 May 2001]:* We have no information from the US Administration on any consultations they may have had or intend to have with Governments of the Group of 77 on issues relating to missile defence.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to consult the Governments of the British Commonwealth over the security and economic implications of missile defence systems. [160811]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 10 May 2001]:* We regularly discuss a range of foreign and security policy issues in meetings with Commonwealth Governments.

Palestinian Authority

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with EU Commissioner Chris Patten regarding the level of corruption in the Palestinian Authority. [160982]

Mr. Wilson: We fully support calls by the EU General Affairs Council for the Palestinian Authority to take effective measures against corruption. We welcome EU Commissioner Chris Patten's efforts to encourage greater transparency within the Palestinian Authority.

The Government regularly urge the Palestinian Authority to implement effective reforms. The Foreign Secretary last raised the issue directly with Palestinian Minister for Planning and International Co-operation, Nabil Sha'ath when they met on 1 May.

Palestinian Schools

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making to the Palestinian Authority regarding the content of literature in school books in Palestinian schools. [160981]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are deeply concerned by allegations of incitement through literature being used in Palestinian schools. We have sought assurances from the Palestinian Authority, that no such material is contained within the textbooks of the new Palestinian curriculum.

We urge both sides to maintain objectivity and historical accuracy in their school books and we encourage them to "educate for peace" by promoting reconciliation and greater mutual understanding.

Gaza Strip

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Palestinian Authority regarding mortar shells fired from within the Gaza Strip into Israel. [160983]

Mr. Wilson: In his telephone conversation with Nabil Sha'ath, Palestinian Minister for Planning and International Co-operation, on 18 April, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary stressed that the international community was looking to the Palestinian Authority to take every possible step to halt the mortar attacks. We are in regular contact with the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel, urging them to resume security co-operation and to do all in their power to end the violence.

US Military Personnel

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many US military personnel work in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* British Overseas Territories; and if the UK-US treaties covering military co-operation proscribe any limit on deployment in the UK. [160807]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 10 May 2001]:* The information requested is not centrally held and is in the process of being collated. I will write to my hon. Friend with the information as soon as it is available.

Lebanon

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Lebanese Prime Minister to discuss the presence of Hizbollah in southern Lebanon; and if he will make a statement. [160989]

Mr. Wilson: The Secretary of State has no plans at present to meet the Lebanese Prime Minister. The Government regularly urge the Lebanese Government to assert its authority fully in southern Lebanon and maintain law and order up to the "Blue Line".

Space-based Energy Weapons

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make an assessment of the compatibility of space-based energy weapons systems using nuclear power with the non-proliferation treaty. [160803]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 10 May 2001]:* Space-based energy weapons systems using nuclear power for non-explosive purposes would be compatible with obligations of both nuclear-weapon state and non-nuclear weapon state parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Spaced-based energy systems using nuclear power for explosives would be compatible with the obligations of nuclear-weapons state parties to the Treaty but not with the obligations of non-nuclear weapon state parties to the Treaty.

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters were discussed in the tête-à-tête discussions at the meeting referred to in the letter from G. P. Hinduja to the Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister on 9 June 1998; and if the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) was present. [161101]

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Member for Leicester, East was not present at the 5 June 1998 meeting. Discussion was exclusively on current issues of Indian foreign policy.

Brajesh Mishra

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the date was of his meeting with Brajesh Mishra in May and June 1998; and who else was present. [161100]

Mr. Wilson: The Secretary of State met Brajesh Mishra on 5 June. The first part of the meeting was tête-à-tête. British and Indian officials sat in on the remainder of the meeting. No-one else was present.

Israel/Lebanon (Kidnappings)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action has been taken by *(a)* Amnesty International, *(b)* the International Committee for the Red Cross, *(c)* the International Commissioner for Human Rights and *(d)* his Department in attempting to secure the release of Israelis kidnapped on the Israeli side of the Israeli-Lebanon border; [160990]

(2) if he will discuss with the Government of Lebanon the whereabouts of *(a)* the three Israeli soldiers kidnapped on the Israeli side of the Israel-Lebanon border and *(b)* the Israeli civilian kidnapped in Switzerland. [160988]

Mr. Wilson: The Government condemn hostage taking under any circumstances. On 3 May the Foreign Secretary and I met the families of the three soldiers kidnapped in occupied Syrian territory on 7 October and the reservist colonel kidnapped in Lebanon on 4 October. The Government are already doing all they can to help and have raised these cases with relevant countries in the region and will continue to do so, pressing particularly for access to the hostages for the ICRC. We also support the ICRC's wish to have access to all those held by Israel in administrative detention. We strongly support all efforts to secure the release of all hostages, particularly efforts led by the United Nations Secretary-General. We are regularly in touch with the relevant organisations but cannot answer for them.

Oslo Accords

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make statement on the honouring of commitments made at the Oslo accords by Israel and the Palestinians not to use violence as a means of furthering national aspirations. [160992]

Mr. Wilson: Since the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements ("Oslo 1") in 1993, both Israel and the Palestinians have consistently committed to pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement in the middle east on the basis of non-violence. The key now is to look forward. We call on both parties to commit every possible energy to bring about an end to violence. We urge them to take immediate parallel steps to break the cycle of violence and build confidence, in the context of a renewed political re-engagement, aimed at an agreement based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the principle of "land for peace", security for Israel within recognised borders and an end of occupation.

Treaty of Nice

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 392W, on the Treaty of Nice, if he will publish the latest version to which he has access of the consolidated versions of the treaties on European Union and establishing the European Communities. [161099]

Mr. Vaz: The latest version of the consolidated treaties is that incorporating the changes made by the Treaty of Amsterdam. It was published as a Command Paper on 29 October 1997 (Cm 3780), and is available in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Import Ban

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral statement of 1 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 524, on the banning of imports, how many of the precedents cited related to the legal grounds of *(a)* animal health and *(b)* public morality. [150876]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The then Government's stated rationale for banning imports of turkeys from France was the potential risk to animal health in relation to Newcastle disease. This argument was rejected by the European Court of Justice.

Neither of the other two cases cited related to the imposition of import bans. In one case, a judicial review against Government for not banning veal calf exports on public morality grounds was not upheld. In the other, restrictions on the ability of non-UK EU fishermen to operate vessels on the UK register were deemed unlawful by the European Court of Justice.

Food and Drink Exports (France)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the financial value of French exports of food and drink was to the United Kingdom in each month in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000. [150246]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* Official Overseas Trade Statistics show that exports of food and drink (excluding live animals) to France during 1999 and 2000 were as follows:

Year/Month	*£ million*
1999	
January	81
February	91
March	104
April	99
May	95
June	94
July	90
August	91
September	108
October	100
November	103
December	104
2000	
January	76
February	73
March	89
April	78
May	73
June	83
July	81
August	82
September	84
October	89
November	94

Source:

HM Customs and Excise

Departmental Travel Costs

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total gross running cost to his Department for travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses met by public funds for visits exclusively within the United Kingdom by *(a)* him and *(b)* Ministers in the last 12 months. [149145]

Mr. Nick Brown: During the 2000–01 financial year £146,126 was spent by Ministers and officials in their private offices on travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses. Of this, £52,655 was spent by my office.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total gross cost to his Department was in the last 12 months of alcoholic drinks. [149146]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Department's financial records do not include a separate heading for alcoholic drinks. The information requested could, therefore, be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when his Department first received an indication of a possible potential outbreak of foot and mouth disease prior to the first confirmed outbreak; what steps his Department has taken to contain such an outbreak; and how many of these measures had been put in place before the first outbreak had been officially confirmed; [154826]

(2) on what date he was first informed of the possibility of an outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [154909]

Ms Quin: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 30 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 493W.

From the outset, the Government put stringent disease control measures rapidly in place, based on the advice of the Chief Veterinary Officer. Movement restrictions were imposed within an 8 km zone as soon as the first case was reported on 19 February. All animal movements in a 10 km infected area were halted as soon as the first case was confirmed on 20 February. On 23 February, on the same day as the first case outside Essex was confirmed at Heddon-on-the-Wall, a nationwide prohibition on animal movements was imposed. The UK Government and the European Commission also acted swiftly to prohibit temporarily the export of live animals, meat, fresh milk and other animal products from the UK from 20 February onwards.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial support has been given to farmers in Shrewsbury and Atcham affected by foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [156561]

Ms Quin: All farmers are paid full market value as compensation for any animals slaughtered as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. Compensation is not payable for consequential losses connected with foot and mouth controls. There are no plans at present to make such payments in response to the current outbreak, although this is being kept under review.

We are unable to provide my hon. Friend with specific details of how many farmers in Shrewsbury and Atcham have received compensation so far, as data are not readily available in this form. However, Shrewsbury and Atcham is within the Ministry's Worcester Division (Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire) and, as of 4 May, Worcester Animal Health Office had received 325 claims for compensation. These claims will total £23,737,218.70.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent assessment he has made of the findings on the report of the 1967 foot and mouth outbreak with regard to the time taken between cases being suspected and being confirmed. [155561]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 March 2001]:* The 1967 report investigated the time taken between suspected disease being reported, confirmation and slaughter, and found that in approximately 98 per cent. of cases slaughter was completed by the day following diagnosis. The report commented that veterinary inspectors had to consult MAFF Headquarters by telephone in order for disease to be confirmed, and suggested that diagnosis could instead by made by the veterinary inspector. However, the report also recognised that this procedure ensured that HQ was promptly informed of outbreaks and that it did not delay slaughter.

The Government accepted the recommendations made by the 1967 report at that time and incorporated them into legislation and standing instructions as appropriate.

In the current outbreak, as soon as notification of a suspected case is received by the Divisional Veterinary Manager Form A restrictions are placed on the premises which prohibit any animal, person or thing entering or leaving the premises without permission. A veterinary inspector is required to visit the premises and inspect any susceptible animals within two hours. If the vet believes that disease is present, HQ is contacted, disease is confirmed and all susceptible animals are slaughtered. If the vet is in any doubt as to whether disease is present, all susceptible animals are 'slaughtered on suspicion' and samples are taken for testing at the Institute of Animal Health. If the vet is satisfied that there are no clinical signs of foot and mouth disease or any reason to suspect that disease may be present, slaughter does not take place.

In the majority of suspected cases clinical diagnosis, rather than laboratory diagnosis, is made in order to speed up the process of confirming the disease.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 22 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 358W, on foot and mouth, what cost-benefit analysis has been undertaken on the foot and mouth cull. [156097]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 29 March 2001]:* An EU risk assessment analysing the costs and benefits of both a vaccination and slaughter policy was published in 1993. This concluded that a slaughter policy would cost less than a vaccination policy. It was therefore decided that EU policy should be to slaughter and dispose of affected animals, or those animals exposed to infection, and that this was the most effective way of controlling the disease.

The results of this cost-benefit analysis confirmed the results of a cost-benefit evaluation of alternative control policies for foot and mouth disease which was published in 1973 following the 1967 outbreak.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements he is making to allow farmers to move ewes that are due to lamb but are still on their winter pastures to areas nearer to the farm to which they belong to permit farmers to supervise the lambing; and if he will make a statement. [152807]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 March 2001]:* These arrangements were introduced on 28 April.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reason (1) the Government made no declaration under Regulation 35 of the Products of Animal Origin (Imports and Exports) Regulations 1996 in response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Kwa-Zulu-Natal; [153366]

(2) no Customer Information Note was issued by his Department in response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Kwa-Zulu-Natal. [153368]

Mr. Nick Brown: On 21 September last year we were advised by the European Commission that the South African Authorities had declared 16 magisterial districts as controlled areas in the Kwa-Zulu-Natal Province and as a consequence the South African authorities were not issuing health certificates required for imports of meat into the EU. The Government were content with this situation at that time. However, it became clear from later reports to the Standing Veterinary Committee that the disease situation in South Africa was deteriorating. In view of this, on 5 January the Government issued a Declaration under Regulation 35 of the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996, prohibiting meat imports from all of South Africa. A Customer Information Note explaining the situation was sent out on 8 January, as was a letter to all UK Border Inspection Posts. Similar action to the above was taken by Scotland and Northern Ireland shortly after the dates specified. After 21 September our records show that there were no imports of meat from South Africa into the UK.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ban the import of meat from countries outside the EU where there is foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [156217]

Ms Quin: EC rules only permit the importation of meat from a limited number of third countries where foot and mouth disease is present in circumstances where the veterinary authorities have contained the disease in specified regions. The meat must come from those regions of the relevant countries that are not considered to pose a risk to human or animal health. Fully matured boneless beef, which does not pose an FMD risk, may be imported from other regions subject to veterinary certification. Countries to which these controls currently apply are Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay.

Domestic legislation in England and Wales currently prohibits the import of meat from South Africa and Swaziland (since 5 January 2001), Argentina (since 14 March) and Uruguay (since 26 April) and Brazil (10 May). Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar action for each of these countries shortly after each of the dates specified. All meat imported from third countries is subject to veterinary checks at Border Inspection Posts to ensure that import requirements are met.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the *(a)* disposal methods being employed and *(b)* length of time taken to dispose of animal carcases slaughtered as part of the control of foot and mouth disease in Worcestershire; [155161]

(2) what plans he has to use additional sites in Worcestershire for the disposal of culled animals; [156986]

(3) when disposal of carcases will begin at the Waresley landfill site in Worcestershire; for how long the site will be used for this purpose; and how many animals he anticipates will be disposed of at the site. [157699]

Ms Quin: We will continue to use all safe disposal methods available to us. At present the main options are burial or burning on farm, incineration in authorised incinerators, rendering, disposal in specially identified landfill or mass burial sites, or burning in mass burning sites. Commercial landfill sites are used primarily for the disposal of animals slaughtered under the Livestock Disposal (Welfare) Scheme.

In Worcestershire, there are no suitable incinerators or rendering facilities, so these are not options. Although the Waresley site in Worcestershire has been approved by the Environment Agency for carcase disposal, there are no plans at the present time to use this site.

There is a mass burial site currently being used, at Throckmorton airfield. There are currently no plans to use additional sites in Worcestershire.

With the help of the armed forces, we have been able to reduce significantly the time taken to dispose of carcases in the majority of cases. The statistics collected for Hereford and Worcester show that for animals slaughtered in this area in the week commencing 22 April, the average time taken to dispose of carcases was 28 hours.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if *(a)* semen and *(b)* embryos from (i) foot and mouth infected animals and (ii) foot and mouth vaccinated animals can be used subsequent to an outbreak within the criteria for disease-free status. [156651]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* Semen and embryos from foot and mouth infected animals are not eligible for use. In the event of a vaccination policy being adopted, Community rules would set out any restrictions on the use of semen and embryos from vaccinated animals.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) which Ministers in his Department approved the contingency plan for dealing with an outbreak of foot and mouth disease; and on what dates; [156877]

(2) on what date since he became the Minister the contingency plan for dealing with an outbreak of foot and mouth disease was first put to him by his officials for his consideration; and what his response was; [156878]

(3) pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling on 4 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 220W, on foot and mouth, on what date his Department's updated contingency plan for foot and mouth was approved by the European Commission; [158305]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 4 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 220W, on foot and mouth, if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's contingency plan that was submitted to the European Commission in July 2000; [158304]

(5) pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling of 4 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 220W, on foot and mouth, if he will list the bodies outside his Department which were consulted over the updating of his Department's contingency plan for foot and mouth before it was submitted to the European Commission in July 2000. [158306]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 4 April and 23 May 2001]:* Contingency planning against foot and mouth disease operates at two levels. The GB contingency plan provides a general overview of our planned response to an outbreak. It was approved by Commission Decision 93/455/EEC on 23 July 1993 as being in compliance with the requirements of European Commission Decision 91/42/EEC. The revised version of the contingency plan submitted to the European Commission in July 2000 did not require formal approval by the European Commission.

No bodies outside my Department were consulted during this revision of the contingency plans. The update was a purely factual one to expand the section on publicity and disease awareness so that it covered the same ground as the Classical Swine Fever contingency plan. The State Veterinary Service Standing Instructions for foot and mouth disease set out the detailed procedures to be followed during an outbreak. It was not necessary for Ministers to approve the revision to the contingency plans last year.

As the outbreak of foot and mouth has progressed, Ministers have been involved in daily discussions with officials, other Government Departments and interested parties on the development and implementation of our disease control strategies.

A copy of the foot and mouth contingency plans for Great Britain will be placed in the Libraries of the House. The Standing Instructions of the State Veterinary Service are already available in the MAFF library. A copy of this document, which has had certain commercially confidential sections removed on legal advice, is being placed in the Libraries of the House.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what economic analysis his Department has conducted into *(a)* the costs and benefits to the UK economy and *(b)* the costs to public funds of (i) a cull to eradicate and (ii) a vaccination without eradication approach to foot and mouth disease; and if he will publish the analysis. [157070]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* European Union rules on the control of foot and mouth disease were amended in 1990 when it was decided that eradication was preferable to vaccination. This decision was taken after consideration of a risk assessment to compare the costs and benefits of a vaccination and non-vaccination policy and on the assumption that disease outbreaks would be stamped out in both cases. This study concluded that the economic costs of a vaccination policy to the food chain would be substantially higher than the costs of a slaughter policy. This confirmed the conclusions of an earlier study carried out in the UK following the 1967 outbreak and published in the Journal of Agricultural Economics in 1973.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make provision for limited movement licensing of bulls in time for the end of the present spring calving period. [157252]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* We have modified the FMD longer distance movement scheme to remove the welfare test which normally needs to be satisfied before animals can be moved. It is now possible for male FMD susceptible animals including bulls to move for breeding purposes. All other conditions of the scheme, apart from the welfare test, will continue to apply.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many landfill sites in the North Wiltshire constituency he intends to use for the burial of carcases; how many such carcases there will be; and from where they will be transported. [157546]

Ms Quin: The following landfill sites in Wiltshire have been identified by the Environment Agency, subject to meeting specific criteria, as suitable for carcase disposal:

Viridor Waste Management, Westbury, Towbridge Road, Wiltshire Viridor Waste Management, Sands Farm, Sandpit Road, Calne, Wiltshire.

It is expected that approximately 100 tonnes of carcases will be disposed at each of these two sites per day. There are approximately 20–25 sheep or 10 pigs or two cattle to one tonne. As for where carcases are transported from, decisions are made on a daily basis according to the availability of resources and depending on the number and location of carcases.

This information is correct as of 8 May 2001.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if local vets will be allowed to agree movement of livestock in the local vicinity with supervision to enable farmers to manage stock. [157394]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* These arrangements were introduced on 28 April.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the movement of cattle on farms in Chorley in order to ease overcrowding. [157164]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* Various schemes have been introduced since the start of the FMD outbreak to permit the movement of farm animals. Details are available from the MAFF website, and helplines.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will issue guidance on the minimum ratio of vets to animals culled; and what plans he has to increase the ratio. [157540]

Ms Quin: There has been no guidance issued on the ratio of vets to animals culled.

The State Veterinary Service is instructed to provide veterinary supervision of slaughter teams. Depending on the number of animals to be slaughtered on each farm, a veterinary officer will audit the work of up to a maximum of 10 slaughter teams. There are no plans to change these instructions.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what sites are being considered in Herefordshire for the burial of slaughtered livestock; and if he will make a statement; [157249]

(2) what consultations he has had with *(a)* Herefordshire council, *(b)* local parish councils and *(c)* local NFU representatives on the location of sites in Herefordshire for the burial of livestock; and if he will make a statement. [157250]

Ms Quin *[holding answers 6 May 2001]:* There are no mass burial or landfill sites under consideration for the burial of slaughtered livestock in Herefordshire. The Environment Agency has undertaken risk assessments of the suitability of proposed locations for on-farm burials of carcases. No consultations have been carried out with Herefordshire council, local parish councils or the NFU over the disposal of carcases in Herefordshire.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate he has made of the number of illegal animal movements occurring each week and the numbers of foot and mouth outbreaks caused by such movements; [157557]

(2) how many farmers have been prosecuted for the illegal movement of animals; and how many farmers have been discovered illegally moving animals since the start of the foot and mouth outbreak. [157558]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Three farmers have been convicted to date by local authorities for illegal movements of foot and mouth susceptible animals. There have been many allegations of illegal movements of animals and the police and local authorities are engaged in the prevention and detection of illegal movements.

Epidemiological investigation so far has not found any case in which an illegal movement of animals has been positively identified as a cause of disease in a new place but a large number of illegal movements are under investigation and the risks of spreading foot and mouth this way are very high.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his estimate is of the cost to date of providing compensation in connection with the foot and mouth outbreak. [157516]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The estimate of the cost up to 5 May of compensation for the compulsory slaughter of animals and destruction of infected items in connection with the foot and mouth outbreak is £629 million.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he takes to ensure that the information on his Department's list of infected premises by county website is *(a)* accurate and *(b)* updated to within the last 24 hours. [156925]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The list of infected premises and the county list on the website is updated several times a day with details of new cases when official confirmation of disease is sent to the Divisional Veterinary Manager at the relevant MAFF Animal Health Divisional Office.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of contiguous farms which will be closed down as a result of the foot and mouth crisis; and if he will make a statement. [158056]

Ms Quin: No estimate has been made at this stage but the matter will be kept under review.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries, and regions thereof, from which imports of meat are admitted into the United Kingdom; and which of these *(a)* currently and *(b)* in the last 12 months have had occurrences of foot and mouth disease. [158381]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* EU rules permit the importation into the Community of fresh meat of the bovine, ovine, caprine and porcine species are currently permitted from the following countries:

All EU countries
Argentina
Australia
Brazil
Bulgaria
Botswana
Canada
Croatia
Chile
Czech Republic
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Greenland
Hungary
Iceland
Namibia
New Zealand
Paraguay
Poland
Romania
Slovakia
Slovenia
South Africa
Swaziland
Switzerland
Uruguay
USA
Yugoslavia
Zimbabwe.

Of those listed, the following countries have had outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in the last 12 months:

EU countries:

France
Greece
The Netherlands
The Republic of Ireland

Third countries:

Argentina
Brazil
Namibia
South Africa
Swaziland
Uruguay.

Following outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, domestic legislation in England and Wales currently prohibits the import of meat from South Africa and Swaziland (since 5 January 2001), Argentina (since 14 March) and Uruguay (since 26 April). Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar action for each of these countries shortly after each of the dates specified.

Community legislation recognises that disease is present in some countries but also recognises where it has been contained in specific regions. The importation of meat is permitted from a limited number of countries where foot and mouth disease is present but only where the disease is so contained. Imports of fresh meat are only permitted from those regions of the relevant countries that are not considered to pose a risk to human or animal health. Fully matured boneless beef, which does not pose an FMD risk, may be imported from other regions subject to veterinary certification.

All meat imported from third countries is subject to veterinary checks at Border Inspection Posts to ensure that import requirements are met.

Following outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, domestic legislation in England and Wales currently prohibits the import of meat from South Africa and Swaziland (since 5 January 2001), Argentina (since 14 March), Uruguay (since 26 April) and Brazil (since 10 May). Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar action for each of these countries shortly after each of the dates specified.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list on his Department's website the addresses of premises where foot and mouth disease preventive culls are carried out. [158202]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The website presently lists the details of all premises that have been confirmed as having foot and mouth disease present. There are no plans to list those premises where preventive culls are being carried out. However, should disease be confirmed in premises where preventive culling has taken place, details of the premises will be placed on the website.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what standing instructions, made, pursuant to the conclusions of the Western Command report on the 1967–68 outbreak of foot and mouth, were in place prior to the current outbreak; and if he will place a copy of the current standing instructions in the Library. [158222]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Ministry relied on the Northumberland Report when drawing up revised contingency plans after the 1967–68 outbreak. The Western Command Report was an internal Ministry of Defence Report. The GB contingency plan for dealing with outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease, in accordance with Article 5 of Council Directive 90/423/EEC, provides a general overview of our planned response to an outbreak. The State Veterinary Service Standing Instructions for foot and mouth disease set out the detailed procedures to be followed during an outbreak. Copies of both documents will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the reasons for the spread of foot and mouth disease in Worcestershire; what role contiguous culls have played in inhibiting the spread of the disease in the county; and if he will make a statement. [158477]

Ms Quin: As in other parts of the country the epidemiology of the outbreaks in Worcester is complex and multifactoral. However, as elsewhere, introduction and subsequent dissemination relates to sheep movement and sheep husbandry practices.

Detailed epidemiological studies of individual cases are still being pursued with a view to ensuring that origin and spread is correctly identified. These studies will also take into account the efficiency of the contiguous culls, both nationally and in Worcestershire.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what experiments his Department had carried out on the foot and mouth virus before the current outbreak; and what assessment he has made of the possibility of contamination of the national *(a)* herd and *(b)* flock as a result of such tests. [158249]

Ms Quin: There are many different strains of foot and mouth disease (FMD) virus. The strain responsible for the current outbreak is a new strain to the UK of FMD virus, but is related to other strains belonging to the type O PanAsia group. Although the Institute for Animal Health, Pirbright, has carried out experiments with other viruses belonging to the type O PanAsia group, no work could be done on this new strain before the current outbreak, so nothing was known about the virulence or genetic characteristics. It was therefore not possible to make any assessment of the risk of this particular strain infecting the national herd and flock.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a cost-benefit analysis of *(a)* slaughter and *(b)* vaccination to control foot and mouth with special reference to (i) costs to the public purse and (ii) costs to trade. [158499]

Ms Quin: A risk assessment analysing the costs and benefits of both a vaccination and slaughter policy was carried out by the EU and published in 1993. This looked at the cost for each member state of vaccinating animals and, if vaccination were not used, the cost of an outbreak for each member state. The assessment concluded that a slaughter policy would cost less than a vaccination policy.

A copy of this study will be made available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will empower local authorities to require areas of commonland to be fenced to retain livestock where such action would *(a)* inhibit the spread of foot and mouth disease and *(b)* benefit the rural economy during the foot and mouth outbreak. [158564]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend the Minister has powers under the Animal Health Act 1981 to make an order empowering a local authority to require areas of common land to be fenced when such action would inhibit or prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease.

My right hon. Friend has no such power to make an order for the sole purpose of benefiting the rural economy, but fencing as part of a strategy of safely reopening footpaths is being considered by Ministers in the DETR.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will empower local authorities to require livestock to be removed from commonland where such action would *(a)* inhibit the spread of foot and mouth disease and *(b)* substantially benefit the rural economy during the foot and mouth outbreak. [158563]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend the Minister has powers under the Animal Health Act 1981 (as amended) to make an order empowering a local authority to require the movement of animals for disease control purposes. No such order has been made. My right hon. Friend has no such power to make an order for the sole purpose of benefiting the rural economy.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will empower local authorities to permit commoners to provide fodder to their livestock on commonland where such action would substantially benefit the rural economy during the current foot and mouth epidemic; [158561]

(2) if he will empower local authorities to permit commoners to provide fodder to their livestock on commonland where such action would inhibit the spread of foot and mouth disease. [158562]

Ms Quin: There are no restrictions on the movement of fodder in either the controlled area or infected areas unless the fodder is being moved from infected premises, when it can only be moved under licence. Moreover, there is a requirement under animal welfare legislation for livestock owners to take reasonable steps to ensure that animals are fed a wholesome diet in sufficient quantity.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans his Department has to fund the economic research required to understand the continuing impact of foot and mouth disease. [158590]

Ms Quin: We continue to assess the various economic impacts of the disease but it is too early to identify these robustly, because the future path of the outbreak is still uncertain. We will commission new research where it offers the prospect of improving our understanding of the impacts. The results of any commissioned research will be made public.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if civilians and other staff working at Throckmorton airfield on the disposal of carcases *(a)* have contact with other livestock in other locations or *(b)* live on a livestock farm; and if he will make a statement. [158566]

Ms Quin: There have been 120 personnel involved in the disposal operation at Throckmorton during the peak of activity. Some may have stayed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation on farms, making a contribution to individual local business and to the wider rural economy in the locality.

Strict decontamination routines are enforced, which apply to both vehicles and personnel entering and leaving the site.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of *(a)* milk sampling, *(b)* blood testing, *(c)* throat swabs, *(d)* faeces testing and *(e)* visual inspection as methods of diagnosing foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [158509]

Ms Quin: Live virus and viral antigen can be found in milk, blood, throat and faeces of infected animals. Specific antibody can be found in the blood and saliva of animals recovered from foot and mouth disease. Recovered sheep and cattle, and vaccinated sheep and cattle which have had contact with live foot and mouth disease virus continue to carry the virus in the pharyngeal region for up to three years in cattle and nine months in sheep; this virus can be recovered using a probang sampling technique which collects saliva and cellular material from the pharynx. Tests for foot and mouth disease virus antigen and antibody are outlined in the OIE Manual of Standards for Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines (2000). These are the tests used at the IAH laboratory in Pirbright. However, Pirbright scientists are constantly investigating new and more sensitive methods of diagnosis, such as polymerase chain reaction and the use of monoclonal antibodies.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the *(a)* minimum and *(b)* maximum distance is from an outbreak of foot and mouth within which the free movement of cattle is precluded; and if he will make a statement. [158452]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The whole of Great Britain was declared a controlled area on 23 February and since then livestock may be moved only under approved movement schemes and subject to licence. The conditions attached to these licences vary depending on the proximity of the movement to an infected place and the requirement of the particular scheme.

The tightest restrictions are in the infected areas drawn around infected premises. The boundary is at least 10 km from the infected premises but may extend in places to slightly more than this, e.g. where a geographical feature such as a river provides a natural barrier. Within the infected area, a protection zone is drawn at a radius of 3 km from the infected premises.

However, subject to the overriding need to continue to eradicate the disease, the Government are being as flexible as possible to allow the movement of livestock within infected areas.

From 23 April, animals from farms in the infected areas, but outside protection zones, have been allowed to move direct to slaughter to an abattoir within the same infected area. The licences for these movements are issued by local authorities. And rules introduced on 3 May allow the movement of healthy animals direct to slaughter from within a protection zone, subject to certain conditions. These animals may leave the protection zone but not the infected area. The licences for these movements are issued by MAFF animal health offices.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will redraw the boundaries to allow cattle on the west bank of the River Avon to be transported for slaughter; and if he will make a statement. [158453]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Although the River Avon is outside the 10 km zone required around an infected place it provides the most sensible barrier to delineate the edge of the infected area. However, although cattle on the west bank remain within the infected area, more flexibility exists to allow farmers to move animals within them. In particular, changes to movement restrictions introduced on 23 April now mean that livestock in infected areas can be moved direct to slaughter for human consumption to approved areas within the same infected area. Full details of these arrangements are available from the Ministry's website http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to be able to ease movement restrictions in restricted areas of South Derbyshire. [158571]

Ms Quin: The only area of Derbyshire in which blood sampling has recently been carried out with a view to lifting restrictions is around Dovedale. The sampling is now complete and we await the results of those tests. Other areas are being kept under review and the procedures which lead to the lifting of restrictions will be introduced as soon as it is safe to implement them.

In the meantime, and subject to the overriding need to continue to eradicate the disease, the Government are being as flexible as possible to allow the movement of livestock within infected areas.

From 23 April, animals from farms in the infected areas, but outside protection zones, have been allowed to move direct to slaughter to an abattoir within the same infected area. The licences for these movements are issued by local authorities. And rules introduced on 3 May allow the movement of healthy animals direct to slaughter from within a protection zone, subject to certain conditions. These animals may leave the protection zone but not the infected area. The licences for these movements are issued by MAFF animal health offices.

Information on all these matters is available on the MAFF website http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals which have not been identified with foot and mouth infection had been slaughtered by midnight 9 April; and if he will make a statement: [158715]

Ms Quin: As at midnight on 9 April, 810,000 animals had been slaughtered on premises contiguous to, or identified as a dangerous contact to, an infected premises[1].

Animals are slaughtered on contiguous or dangerous contact premises where there is reason to believe they have been exposed to infection and could be incubating disease although there is no clinical sign of it.

[1] Source:

MAFF disease control system database—figures subject to revision as more data become available.

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the plants authorised to render foot and mouth animals. [158749]

Ms Quin: The following rendering plants have been authorised to take all carcases slaughtered as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak, which includes infected animals.

Fats & Proteins (UK) Ltd., Lancaster

Forrest (W) & Son (Paisley) Ltd., Newarthill, Scotland

Granox Ltd., Widnes, Cheshire

Peninsular Proteins Ltd., Torrington, North Devon

Thomas (JL) & Co Ltd., Exeter

Waddingtons (P) & Co Ltd., Bradford.

In addition, the following plants have been authorised to take only carcases slaughtered under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme:

Canterbury Mills Ltd., Kent

Dundas Chemical Co, Dumfries

Dundas Proteins Ltd., Bradford

Pears (JG) Ltd., Neward

Pointon (John) & Sons Ltd., Leek, Staffs.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to list cases of slaughter on suspicion of foot and mouth disease on his Department's website. [159376]

Ms Quin: The website presently lists the details of all premises that have been confirmed as having foot and mouth disease present. We do not currently include premises where slaughter on suspicion has been authorised, but do not rule this out and further consideration to it will be given.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what warnings he received from *(c)* the FAO and (b) the EU Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare on the impact of large-scale movements of animals within the EU and the high density of livestock on the risk of foot and mouth outbreaks. [158872]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The FAO meets to review and report on the international situation regarding serious animal diseases like foot and mouth disease. The EU Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare is a scientific committee of the European Commission that considers matters affecting animal health in the European Union. While we are not aware of any specific warnings issued by these bodies regarding the impact of large scale movements of animals, a number of documents have been circulated among EU members in the context of the on-going review of the FMD control directive.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many livestock have been slaughtered in contiguous culls next to sites registered as confirmed foot and mouth outbreaks but which subsequently showed a negative result from the laboratory tests; and if he will make a statement. [159359]

Ms Quin: The information requested is given in the table:

	Great Britain
(a) Infected premises for which laboratory tests detected no FMD virus	370
(b) Number of premises contiguous to (a)[1]	155
(c) Total livestock slaughtered on (b)	127,087

[1] Some premises may also be contiguous to other infected premises.

Note:

Figures subject to revision as more data become available.

Source:

MAFF Disease Control System as at 7 May

Cases are confirmed on the basis of either clinical or laboratory evidence of foot and mouth disease. Cases are cleared when there is neither clear clinical evidence nor laboratory evidence of foot and mouth disease.

Animals are slaughtered on contiguous or dangerous contact premises where there is reason to believe they may have been exposed to infection and could be incubating disease although there is no clinical sign of it.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if cases which were registered as confirmed foot and mouth outbreaks but which subsequently showed a negative result from the laboratory tests were removed from the register of confirmed outbreaks; and if he will make a statement. [159358]

Ms Quin: No. The status of such cases remains as confirmed.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the farms from which animals have been burnt at Salsdons Farm, Himbleton, Worcestershire; and if he will make a statement. [158983]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Most of the cattle and sheep disposed of at Salsdons Farm came from eight premises in the immediate vicinity. 200 cattle were transported by the Army from Gloucestershire where no disposal options were available at the time. For reasons of data protection and confidentiality we can release information on premises affected by the outbreak (other than infected premises) only to organisations that require it for the purposes of safeguarding public health and for co-ordinating rural recovery programmes, unless the individuals concerned have given written consent.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many cases which were registered as confirmed foot and mouth outbreaks returned a negative result from the laboratory tests of samples from the stock; and if he will make a statement; [159357]

(2) how many livestock have been slaughtered on sites registered as confirmed foot and mouth outbreaks but which subsequently showed a negative result from the laboratory tests; and if he will make a statement. [159360]

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many confirmed infected premises have subsequently tested negative. [159452]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* As at 19:00 on 1 May 2001, there were 1,525 confirmed cases of which 305 gave a negative result on laboratory testing. A total of 208,352 animals relating to these 305 cases were slaughtered. For 364 cases either no samples were taken or the results are awaited.

Cases are confirmed on the basis of either clinical or laboratory evidence of foot and mouth disease. Cases are cleared when there is neither clear clinical evidence nor laboratory evidence of foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the reasons were for the culling of the cattle belonging to the Duke of Westminster; what considerations determined the timing of the culling; and if he will make a statement. [159574]

Ms Quin: The hon. Member is asked to write specifying which cattle on which farm he is referring to, and if the animals are not on infected premises, with an assurance that the Duke of Westminster has given his written consent for this information to be released to him.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library the results of studies *(a)* done and *(b)* commissioned by his Department into the comparative merits of culling and vaccination of foot and mouth infected animals. [159732]

Ms Quin: A risk assessment carried out by the EU analysing the costs and benefits of both a vaccination and a slaughter policy against foot and mouth disease was published in 1993. Following the 1967 foot and mouth outbreak a cost benefit evaluation of alternative control policies for foot and mouth disease was published in 1973 in the "Journal of Agricultural Economics". Copies of both these studies have now been made available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many farms in Cumbria which were classed as dangerous contacts, temporary veterinary inspectors discovered foot and mouth when they went to conduct the contiguous on 3 km cull; and how many *(a)* cattle and *(b)* sheep were affected. [159466]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* As at 4 May 2001, there were 477 dangerous contacts in Cumbria, of which 47 premises later had foot and mouth disease confirmed and were therefore reclassified as infected premises.

Two of these cases were confirmed on site by temporary veterinary inspectors. The remaining cases were initially slaughtered on suspicion; foot and mouth disease was subsequently confirmed as a result of positive test results.

A total of 8,907 cattle and 24,865 sheep were slaughtered on these premises.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many farms in Devon animals have been slaughtered because they were contiguous to a farm which eventually tested negative for foot and mouth disease; and how many animals were slaughtered. [159473]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The information requested is given in the following table.

Devon	*Number*
(a) Infected premises for which laboratory tests detected no FMD virus	41
(b) Number of premises contiguous to (a)[1]	31
(c) Total cattle slaughtered on *(b)*	4,414
(d) Total sheep slaughtered on *(b)*	20,024

[1] Some premises may also be contiguous to other infected premises

Note:

Figures subject to revision as more data become available.

Source:

MAFF Disease Control System as at 6 May

Cases are confirmed on the basis of either clinical or laboratory evidence of FMD. Cases are cleared when there is neither clear clinical evidence nor laboratory evidence of FMD.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many infected premises classified as such in *(a)* England, *(b)* Cumbria and *(c)* Devon subsequently have proved not to be infected; and how many cattle and sheep were involved. [159464]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The position as at 3 May is shown in the table.

	England	*Cumbria*	*Devon*
(a) Number of infected premises for which laboratory testing proved negative	222	55	40
(b) Number of cattle slaughtered on *(a)*	23,838	7,457	4,548
(c) Number of sheep slaughtered on *(a)*	125,079	25,019	19,512

Source:

MAFF Disease Control System database—figures subject to revision as more data become available

Cases are confirmed on the basis of either clinical or laboratory evidence of foot and mouth disease. Cases are cleared when there is neither clear clinical evidence nor laboratory evidence of foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farm animal carcases were disposed of in Devon on each of the days from 16 to 25 April; and at what locations these farm animal carcases were disposed of during this period. [R] [159589]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The table shows the number of carcases disposed of in Devon on the days in question.

Cattle, sheep and pig carcases disposed of in Devon

Date	*Number*
16 April	5,857
17 April	2,326
18 April	8,523
19 April	2,762
20 April	10,864
21 April	16,513
22 April	20,130
23 April	67,084
24 April	21,300
25 April	13,984

Carcases in this period were disposed of through rendering by J. L. Thomas of Exeter and Peninsular Proteins of Great Torrington and on-farm burning at 48 premises.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were slaughtered *(a)* on suspicion and *(b)* as confirmed cases of foot and mouth in Devon, indicating the farms concerned on each of the days from 16 to 25 April. [159590]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* Our policy, based on legal advice, is to release details of infected premises as this information is necessary for the control of foot and mouth. For reasons of data protection and confidentiality we only release information on other premises affected by the outbreak to organisations that require it for the purpose of safeguarding public health and for co-ordinating rural recovery programmes, unless the individuals concerned have given written consent.

For this reason, while I am able to release figures on the number of animals slaughtered in confirmed cases of foot and mouth, and on the number of animals slaughtered on suspicion, I cannot release the list of individual farms where animals were slaughtered on suspicion.

I have placed two tables in the Library. The first table gives the daily total of slaughter on suspicion and confirmed foot and mouth cases, the second identifies the farm locations of the confirmed foot and mouth cases.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, how many animals were slaughtered (*a*) on suspicion and (*b*) as confirmed cases of foot and mouth in Devon, indicating the farms concerned on each of the days from 16–25 April. [159590]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The table gives details of the numbers of animals slaughtered on suspicion in Devon (SOS cases) and the number of animals slaughtered on infected premises (FMD cases) in Devon from 16–25 April.

Animals slaughtered in Devon, 16–25 April 2001

Data as at 1900, 2 May 2001

	SOS Cases	*FMD Cases*
16 April 2001	301	1,620
17 April 2001	274	0
18 April 2001	439	164
19 April 2001	618	3,558
20 April 2001	0	3,625
21 April 2001	0	50
22 April 2001	0	1,624
23 April 2001	1,070	0
24 April 2001	1,724	740
25 April 2001	0	317
Total	4,426	11,698

The following table gives details of farms in Devon which were identified as infected premises on 16–25 April and where the animals were slaughtered as a result.

Name	*Address*
M. & I. Littlejohns	Minehouse Farm, Okehampton, Devon EX20 4LN
S. & M.J. & J.M. Cork	Chuggaton, Chittlehampton, Umberleigh, Devon EX37 9SB
E.W. Underhill & Son	Upcott, Barton Beaford, Winkleigh, Devon EX19 8AQ
R.W. & W.H. Weeks	Beer Hill, North Tawton, Devon EX20 2AD
K. & R. Elworthy	Upcott, Burrington, Umberleigh, Devon EX37 9LF
Griffin	Thorndon House, Ashwater Beaworthy, Devon EX21 5HD
G.M. & R.L. Macer & Son	Summerwell, Hartland, Bideford, Devon EX39 6HB
Avery	Beara Farm, Marwood, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 4EH
P.K. Dunn	Holmacott Farm, Instow, Bideford, Devon EX39 4LR
M.J. & S.A. Hill	Higher Broadpark, Iddesleigh, Winkleigh EX19 8BN

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the landfill sites in Surrey, Sussex and Kent that have been allocated to take animal carcases as a result of the foot and mouth crisis; [157602]

(2) when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton of 6 April (ref 157602). [160922]

Ms Quin: The following landfill sites in Sussex and Kent have been identified by the Environment Agency, subject to meeting specific criteria, as suitable for carcase disposal.

Biffa Waste Services Ltd., Brookhurstwood Landfill, Langhurstwood Road, Warnham, Horsham, West Sussex

Viridor Waste Management, Horton Landfill Site, Horton Clay Pit, Small Dole, Henfield, West Sussex

Waste Research Group Ltd., Norwood Farm, Lower Road, Brambledown, Isle of Sheppey, Kent

Biffa Waste Services Ltd., Shakespeare Farm, St. Mary Hoo, Rochester, Kent.

These sites have agreed to take carcases of animals slaughtered through the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme. To date, no suitable landfill sites have been identified in Surrey.

This information is correct as of 8 May 2001.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions during the outbreak of foot and mouth disease he has rejected suggestions made in representations from the NFU. [159957]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Other Ministers in the Department and I have met the NFU and other organisations on numerous occasions to discuss the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. We have accepted some of their suggestions and rejected others. It is not possible to quantify the precise numbers.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what circumstances RSPCA officers are prevented from witnessing the slaughter of livestock under the current foot and mouth arrangements. [159841]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* RSPCA officers are not permitted to enter premises without the permission of the owner concerned. In addition, if premises are under infected premises restrictions, only essential visitors are allowed access for the purposes of disease control. RSPCA officers have visited slaughter and burial sites, such as Great Orton, which are not under restriction.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what the results were of foot and mouth tests carried out at Ashes farm, Ruswarp, near Whitby, North Yorkshire; [R] [159941]

(2) if foot and mouth tests have been carried out at farms adjacent to Ashes farm, Ruswarp, near Whitby, North Yorkshire; [R] [159943]

(3) if there has been an outbreak of foot and mouth disease at Ashes farm, Ruswarp, near Whitby, North Yorkshire. [R] [159942]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Our policy, based on legal advice, is to release details of infected premises as this information is necessary for the control of foot and mouth. For reasons of data protection and confidentiality we only release test results to organisations that require it for the purpose of safeguarding public health and for co-ordinating rural recovery programmes, unless the individual concerned has given written consent.

Ashes farm appears on the list of confirmed cases published on the MAFF website as confirmed on 6 April. Tests have been carried out on contiguous farms.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the results of recent vaccinations against foot and mouth disease in *(a)* The Netherlands, *(b)* Albania, *(c)* Macedonia, *(d)* Taiwan and *(e)* Algeria. [159989]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Government will be considering what lessons can be learned for the future from various aspects of the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease including the approach to vaccination adopted by The Netherlands.

The use of vaccination to control foot and mouth disease in The Netherlands, Albania, and Macedonia were in response to local outbreaks, which could be isolated by using vaccination. Vaccination was used in addition to other control measures.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from people living in the Church Stretton area regarding the firebreak cull of sheep which took place in All Stretton on Wednesday 18 April; and if he will make a statement. [160076]

Ms Quin: The Ministry has received a large number of representations from members of the public over a wide range of issues associated with the Government's slaughter policy. Two meetings have been held with local representatives.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what tests for foot and mouth disease were made in the stock of Mr. Philip Smith-Maxwell after the slaughter on suspicion of the disease that took place at Phepson Manor farm, Worcestershire on 12 and 13 April; what the results of such tests were; and if he will make a statement. [159847]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Our policy based on legal advice is to release details of infected premises, as this information is necessary for the control of foot and mouth. For reasons of data protection and confidentiality we release information on other premises affected by the outbreak only to organisations that require it for the purpose of safeguarding public health and for co-ordinating rural recovery programmes, unless the individual concerned has given written consent.

The farmer mentioned does not appear on the list of confirmed cases published on the Ministry foot and mouth website. If the farmer wishes to know the results of tests done on samples taken from his animals he should approach his animal health office.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment has been made and testing carried out to ascertain the levels of dioxins and furans present on agricultural land in proximity to the sites of pyres for the incineration of dead livestock, and in particular in respect of the presence of TCDDs and TCDFs; and if he will make a statement. [159851]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Department of Health has recently published a risk assessment "Foot and Mouth—Effects on health of Emissions from Pyres Used for Disposal of Animals" available on www.doh.gov.uk. The risk assessment provides estimates of the release of dioxins and other air pollutants from pyres and predicted concentrations in air.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has undertaken monitoring of dioxins, furans and other air pollutants in the vicinity of some larger pyres, being used to dispose of animal carcases. Some local authorities have also instigated such monitoring. In addition the Environment Agency have assisted Government by monitoring and modelling air pollution in the vicinity of pyres.

An initial assessment by the Food Standards Agency suggests that the dioxins deposited onto farmland near pyres will lead to only a small increase to the current levels of dioxins in food.

The Food Standards Agency will measure dioxins in agricultural produce, grass and soil in the vicinity of pyres as part of a concerted programme of monitoring with the Environment Agency. The results will be used to inform decisions about the safety of livestock grazing pasture and the growing of other crops.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make the results of blood tests arising from suspected cases of foot and mouth disease available to private veterinary surgeons engaged by farms where the disease is confirmed by his Department's contracted veterinary laboratory services. [159408]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* The results are available on application to the local divisional veterinary manager.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, for official statistical purposes, the definition of foot and mouth carcase disposal has changed since 20 February. [160215]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 3 May 2001]:* Carcase disposal has been and continues to be defined for official statistical purposes by reference to the date on which disposal was completed. This is reflected in the statistical data published on the Ministry's website http://www.maff.gov.uk.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to make interim payments of compensation to farmers affected by foot and mouth disease. [160702]

Ms Quin: None.

All farmers are paid compensation for any animals slaughtered as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. Stock is valued immediately prior to slaughter and the Ministry's target is to process and pay all compensation claims within three weeks of slaughter. The Ministry is putting in further resources to help meet this target. However, we are aware that in some areas, such as Cumbria where a particularly large number of claims have had to be made, this target is not being met. This is a problem that is currently being addressed and the Ministry is doing all it can to process all claims as quickly as possible. To make interim payments would add further delay.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of claims for compensation for stock slaughter as a result of foot and mouth disease have been paid within 21 days of the cull. [160703]

Ms Quin: The information requested is not readily available.

The Ministry's target is to process and pay all compensation claims within three weeks of slaughter. However, we are aware that in some areas, such as Cumbria where a particularly large number of claims have had to be made, this target is not being met. This is a problem that is being urgently addressed with extra resources and the Ministry is doing all it can to process all claims as quickly as possible.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what livestock has been slaughtered in North Essex constituency in the past seven days due to foot and mouth disease. [160609]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* There have been no livestock slaughtered in the North Essex constituency in the past seven days (1–7 May). Two infected premises were previously reported in this constituency (foot and mouth disease numbers 125 and 401). Animals from these sites were slaughtered and disposed of by 22 March. Slaughter of livestock on premises identified as a dangerous contact to foot and mouth disease 125 took place on 28 April, and disposal occurred on 30 April.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the proposed reduction in the rates payable to farmers under the welfare disposal scheme. [160700]

Ms Quin: Revised payments under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme (LWDS) for those categories of animals intended for the human food chain took effect for all animals collected for slaughter or slaughtered on-farm from Monday 30 April. LWDS was introduced to provide a means of resolving serious animal welfare problems arising directly from the FMD movement restrictions. It was specifically not to be used as an alternative to the market, where the market was available. With the introduction from 23 April of scope to market animals from inside Infected Areas and, more recently, from inside protection zones, the route into the market has now been largely re-established. There was already considerable evidence that the original payment levels were encouraging farmers to use LWDS as their preferred alternative to the market. In light of the greatly increased opportunities some payment rates were reduced to between 70 per cent. and 80 per cent. of market prices. Payment rates for animals not intended to enter the food chain remain unchanged.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the cost is of the burial ground being constructed at Petrockstow, Devon. [R] [160655]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 May 2001]:* The total cost of acquiring the site, including costs and compensation was £350,000. We are unable to give details of further costs at this time.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will meet the Minister for Rural Affairs in the National Assembly for Wales to discuss the operation of the Welfare Disposal Scheme in Monmouthshire. [160701]

Ms Quin: We meet regularly with Ministerial colleagues from the devolved Administrations to consider aspects of agricultural policy and their implementation.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the laboratory samples taken from stock at Eirianfa Farm, near Ardleen in Powys indicated *(a)* the existence of the foot and mouth virus or *(b)* an unreadable or other result; and if he will make a statement. [160741]

Ms Quin: The farm mentioned does not appear to be on the list of confirmed cases published on the Ministry's foot and mouth website. For reasons of data protection and confidentiality we only release information such as that requested by the hon. Member to organisations that require it for the purpose of safeguarding public health and for co-ordinating rural recovery programmes, unless the individual concerned has given written consent.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money has been paid in total to farmers in compensation for slaughtered livestock in the course of the foot and mouth outbreak to date; what the *(a)* average amount paid to each farmer and *(b)* largest payment to a single farmer has been; and if he will make a statement. [160904]

Ms Quin: Up to 9 May, the compensation paid to farmers was £116 million for 1,135 claims. The average claim was therefore £102,000. The largest payment to a single farmer is £4,238,800.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will deal with the claim lodged by Mr. and Mrs. Rogers of the Corner Cottage, Ashprington, Devon for their 10 in-calf cattle under the Welfare Scheme; and if he will make a statement on the reason for the delay in dealing with this claim. [160903]

Ms Quin: It is not practicable or appropriate to comment on the position of individual cases. The Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme has attracted a very high number of applications—apparently 1.6 million animals initially registered from 6,000 applicants. Every effort is being made to minimise delay in processing these, and we are giving priority to the most urgent welfare cases. Given full information on individual applications, the Intervention Board will be happy to provide details of progress.

To date over one million animals have been dealt with under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria have been used in the appointment of valuers used in the valuation of livestock to be culled as a result of *(a)* foot and mouth disease contact and *(b)* inclusion in the Livestock (Welfare) Disposal Scheme. [160752]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 May 2001]:* Valuation of animals which are to be compulsorily slaughtered is carried out by a valuer appointed by the Ministry's local Divisional Veterinary Manager. In addition to existing contacts and nominations by farmers, DVMs may refer to lists of valuers for pedigree stock and commercial stock provided by the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers. No valuer is required if standard rates are used.

Animals slaughtered under the Livestock (Welfare) Disposal Scheme qualify for payments that are designed to assist the farmer in resolving an identified welfare problem. Payments are set at fixed rates and do not represent compensation for the commercial value of the animal.

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms have had animals slaughtered in the contiguous cull. [160900]

Ms Quin: As at 19:00 on 8 May, animals had been slaughtered on 1,548 premises which were contiguous to infected premises.

Source:

MAFF Disease Control system database—figures are subject to revision as more data become available.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farm herds were slaughtered because *(a)* at least one animal had been infected by foot and mouth and *(b)* the herd was considered at risk due to proximity to an infected herd; how many individual animals were slaughtered, similarly broken down; and if he will make a statement. [160821]

Ms Quin: The information requested is provided in the tables:

(a) Infected premises

Number of infected premises—1,565

	Number of herds/flocks	*Animals slaughtered*
Cattle	1,286	249,792
Sheep	1,247	690,865
Pigs	85	22,085
Goats	50	429
Total	2,668	963,171

(b) Contiguous dangerous contact premises

Number of contiguous premises—1,855

	Number of herds/flocks	*Animals slaughtered*
Cattle	915	101,139
Sheep	1,295	460,986
Pigs	99	33,598
Goats	69	787
Total	2,378	596,510

The total number of herds/flocks differs from the number of premises because premises may have more than one herd/flock.

All herds/flocks on an infected premise are slaughtered out where at least one animal in one herd/flock is found to be infected.

Source:

MAFF Disease Control System database at 19.00 on 8 May—figures are subject to revision as more data become available.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what prohibitions exist on imports of animal feed into Britain from countries *(a)* where foot and mouth is endemic and *(b)* where there have been recent outbreaks of the disease. [153361]

Mr. Nick Brown: EU rules govern the production requirements of animal feed in the Community and also provide the conditions for import from third countries. With regard to FMD controls on imports from third countries which have had recent outbreaks, domestic legislation in England and Wales currently prohibits the import of meat from South Africa and Swaziland (since 5 January 2001), Argentina (since 14 March) and Uruguay (since 26 April) and Brazil (10 May). Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar action for each of these countries shortly after each of the dates specified. All meat imported from third countries is subject to veterinary checks at border inspection posts to ensure that import requirements are met. The UK will prohibit the import of any animal products which do not meet Community standards.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will use local vets to agree and supervise the movement of livestock across lanes to ease welfare problems. [158359]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Changes introduced to the Livestock Movement Scheme made on 28 April allow Local Veterinary Inspectors (LVIs) to issue a Local Movement Licence for such a single movement, subject to an inspection prior to movement. LVIs may also issue Occupational Licences for multiple movements, within the same premises and in the same sole occupancy. It is not necessary for the LVI to supervise the movement of animals.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if livestock can be moved on welfare grounds from outside a restricted area to a restricted area. [158358]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Animals may be moved from areas of lower disease risk to areas of higher disease risk, but not in the other direction. Pigs cannot be moved into or through Infected Areas. Licences are not available to move animals to premises within 3.0 km of infected premises or premises subject to foot-and-mouth disease control restrictions. Special arrangements apply to these circumstances.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will allow movement to take place of flocks of sheep owned by single farmers on split sites to lambing sheds on single sites. [158360]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Licences have been available since 9 March to allow animals to be moved for welfare reasons across roads to single premises, between premises in the same ownership, subject to restrictions on the maximum distance. Changes which came into effect on 28 April have allowed such movements to be made for husbandry purposes. Some restrictions remain in place where sheep moved onto premises between 13 and 23 February.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to lift restrictions on the movement of animals at Ley Farm, Diptford, Totnes; and if he will make a statement. [158454]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* We understand that Diptford is outside the infected area and therefore subject only to the general restrictions applying to the GB controlled area. Movements from the controlled area to slaughter continue to be allowed. Details are on the MAFF website http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

Parliamentary Questions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will reply to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Vale of York on 27 March 2001 relating to *(a)* a ban on pigswill (uin156279) *(b)* provision of rare breeds during the foot and mouth crisis (uin156277) *(c)* discussions with European Commissioners about animal health (uin156278) *(d)* exclusion zones (uin156280). [158480]

Mr. Morley: *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to her on 5 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 286–87W, 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 476–77W, 30 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 493W, and 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 122W.

Offal Imports

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from which countries raw offal is imported; what checks are made to ensure that it is free from contamination and infection; and for what purposes such imports are allowed. [154991]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 22 March 2001]:* EU rules permit imports of raw offal for direct sale to the consumer or for the manufacture of meat-based products for both human and animal consumption, from the following third countries:

Argentina

Australia

Bulgaria

Canada

Croatia

Chile

Czech Republic

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

- Greenland
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Mexico
- New Zealand
- Paraguay
- Poland
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- United States of America
- Uruguay
- Switzerland
- Yugoslavia.

Imported offal, like imported meat, must have been produced to EU standards and must be accompanied by appropriate animal and public health certification. Among other things, this health certification confirms that the meat is derived from animals which have been subjected to ante-mortem inspection during 24 hours prior to slaughter. On arrival in the UK, meat imported from third countries must enter at designated Border Inspection Posts (BIPs), where it is subject to veterinary inspection.

All consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and at least 20 per cent. of consignments are subject to physical checks in accordance with EU legislation, which may include analysis for contaminants. These checks are to ensure that conditions of import have been complied with and that the products have remained in a satisfactory condition during transport. They are carried out by Official Veterinary Surgeons employed by the local authority in which the BIP is located.

Community legislation allows the importation of raw offal from FMD control areas in Argentina under special channelling procedures. These procedures require that the material be sent from the port of entry in sealed transport direct to an establishment that has been specifically approved by the competent authority of the member state of destination. It must be accompanied by relevant public and animal and public health certification. The material may be used only for the manufacture of fully cooked meat products. Domestic legislation in England and Wales currently prohibits the import of meat including offal from South Africa and Swaziland (since 5 January 2001), Argentina (since 14 March) and Uruguay (since 26 April). Scotland and Northern Ireland took similar action for each of these countries shortly after each of the dates specified.

Animal Feedstuffs (Import Prohibition)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what controls operate on imports from *(a)* the EU and *(b)* elsewhere on materials likely to be used in animal feedstuffs; what provisions allow prohibition of imports capable of carrying viruses which are a threat to human, animal and plant health; what provisions exist within the rules of the World Trade Organisation permitting such national prohibition; and which persons from (i) the European Commission and (ii) Her Majesty's Government represent the United Kingdom interests at the World Trade Organisation in these matters. [154951]

Ms Quin: EU law governs Community production of materials likely to be used in animal feedstuffs and sets down the import conditions, which must be met by third countries approved to export such products into the Community. EU law also provides for safeguard measures to be applied to imports of animal products and plants when there is a risk to human, animal or plant health. Under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules animal health requirements for trade are expected to be based on the international standards laid down by the Office International des Epizooties. Any provisions in excess of these rules would need to be supported by a risk assessment in relation to animal or public health. Directorate General SANCO of the European Commission, who are based in Brussels, represent all EU member states, including Her Majesty's Government, in WTO fora.

Promotional Campaigns

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the television, newspaper and radio advertising and other promotional campaigns conducted by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its departmental public bodies, in each of the past five years, showing for each the expenditure incurred by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [153414]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 12 March 2001]:* Our records show the following expenditure; figures for advertising do not include poster (except for Foot and Mouth 2001), wallet or ticket advertising. The cost for direct mailing includes the dispatch of forms and explanatory material to farmers for MAFF administered schemes. Agency and non-departmental government bodies are not included as these costs are not held centrally and recovery of the data would be at a disproportionate cost.

£

	Public opinion research	*Television, radio and newspaper advertising*	*Direct mail*
1996–97	78,000	109,000	1,454,000
1997–98	257,000	248,000	1,254,000
1998–99	164,000	834,000	943,000
1999–2000	386,740	614,104	1,026,000
2000–01[1]	83,000	445,992	1,288,589

[1] To date

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 2 April and 3 May from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Anjali Sharma. [160970]

Mr. Nick Brown: I replied to the letter from my right hon. Friend on 8 May.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to answer the letters to him dated 12 March and 19 April from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. A. Blacklock. [160952]

Mr. Nick Brown: I replied to the letter from my right hon. Friend on 3 May.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, dated 26 March and transferred to him by the Home Office, with regard to the Dahem family. [161031]

Mr. Straw: I have been asked to reply.

There is no record of my right hon. Friend's letter being transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from the Home Office.

I will write shortly to my right hon. Friend about the issues he has raised in his correspondence.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will reply to the correspondence and representations concerning Ms Chappell, a constituent. [154060]

Mr. Nick Brown: My noble Friend Baroness Hayman replied to the hon. Member on 8 May.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral statement of 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 852, when he will write to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe. [157635]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister wrote to the right hon. and learned Member on this issue on 9 April 2001.

Bush Meat

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from whom he has received representations on the importation of bush meat in personal luggage in the last three years; and what response he has made. [153358]

Mr. Nick Brown: MAFF has received representations from both the general public and trade sources from time to time over the last three years on the importation of meat. In some cases this referred to "wild game" meat which we take to include bush meat although there is no working definition of the latter term. Where we were asked for advice, we provided information about the UK's import requirements for all kinds of meat. Where we have been advised of the possibility of illegal imports of meat, the relevant enforcement authorities have been advised and the appropriate action taken. Where illegal meat has been identified it is seized and destroyed.

Anthrax (South Africa)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Her Majesty's Government have been informed by the South African Government of the recent outbreak of anthrax in South Africa as required under the International Animal Health Code. [153370]

Mr. Nick Brown: Yes.

Meat and Dairy Imports

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those countries from which meat and dairy products cannot be legally imported into the United Kingdom and the reasons in each case. [154430]

Ms Quin: All meat and dairy products imported into the UK, whether from other EU member states or third countries, must have been produced in accordance with Community legislation, which lays down animal and public health conditions. Imports are accepted only from third countries and establishments, which meet those requirements and are approved to export into the Community. The list of countries and establishments allowed importing into the community and the products concerned are available on the Commission's website at the following address: http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/sanco/vets/info/data/listes/table0.html

These lists are quite long and are subject to change by the European Commission. Countries may also be listed but have no approved establishments in which case they cannot export into the Community.

Ensuring that member states comply with the obligations in properly implementing and applying the rules is the responsibility of the European Commission, whose Food and Veterinary Office carries out regular programmes of inspection visits to all member states. Responsibility for ensuring that third countries meet these four requirements lies with the Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission. The UK will prohibit the importation of animal products that do not meet Community standards.

Meat and Livestock Imports

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what the *(a)* volume and *(b)* value was of seizures of illegal meat and livestock imports into Britain in each of the last 10 years; [157035]

(2) how many prosecutions there were for illegal meat and livestock imports to Britain in each of the last 10 years; what the total value of fines was; and how many convictions there were, for each of these years. [157034]

Ms Quin: This information is not held centrally.

Meat Inspection

Dr. Whitehead: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place a copy in the Library of advice he has issued to port health authorities about their actions in respect of inspection of goods possibly containing smuggled meat products. [156970]

Ms Quin: The responsibility for the day-to-day enforcement of the relevant legislation, the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996 falls to the local authority. This responsibility extends to carrying out routine inspections of manifests and other sources of information in an effort to identify all animal products and ensure they are checked. On 5 April 2001 the Food Standards Agency in consultation with MAFF, issued guidance to Heads of Environmental Health Services and Chief Port Health Officers, copies of which I am placing in the Library.

Livestock Industry

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the date of each EU meeting he has attended at which the future of the British livestock industry was discussed; what EU *(a)* draft and *(b)* other (i) plans, (ii) proposals and (iii) discussion papers relating to (1) the future of the British livestock industry and (2) an arable-only option for English farming he has been informed of; and if he will make a statement. [157047]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* Between July 1998 and April 2001, the Minister and/or I attended 17 meetings of the EU Agriculture Council at which matters affecting he British livestock industry were discussed. In addition, the Minister has attended six informal meetings of the Agriculture Council and I have attended one. These are a forum for discussion on the future direction of EU agri-food policy, based on a Presidency paper. The dates of these meetings, both formal and informal, are set out at Annex A. The outcome of each Council is formally reported to the House.

The most significant set of proposals to date has been the Agenda 2000 proposals on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. First discussed at the Agriculture Council in March 1998, these were refined and finalised in March 1999. The package included reductions to the level of market support to the arable, beef and dairy regimes, and the establishment of a single, integrated legal framework for farm-related rural development and agri-environment measures (the Rural Development Regulation).

Other proposals likely to impact on the livestock industry are:

Commission proposal (April 2000) to amend Common Organisation of Market in pigmeat to permit member states to set producer-financed funds to help stabilise incomes;

Commission proposal (December 2000) to introduce a three-year pilot "Small Farmers' Scheme" simplifying the subsidy system for farmers receiving CAP payments under specified schemes of less than 1,000 euros per year, and

Commission seven-point plan (January 2001) to tackle the difficulties faced by the beef regime in the light of BSE.

All proposals for EU legislation are subject to ministerial and parliamentary scrutiny before they are adopted.

The Government are not aware of any proposals for an arable-only future for the British farming industry.

Annex A: Meetings attended by Minister at which matters affecting British livestock industry were discussed

Date of meeting	*Forum*
20–22 September 1998	Informal Agriculture Council—Austrian Presidency paper: Farming in harmony with nature, agricultural perspectives for rural areas
28 September 1998	Agriculture Council
19–20 October 1998	Agriculture Council
23–24 November 1998	Agriculture Council
14–15 December 1998	Agriculture Council
18–19 January 1999	Agriculture Council
22–23 February 1999	Agriculture Council
4–5 and 9–11 March 1999	Agriculture Council
31 May-1 June 1999	Informal Agriculture Council—German Presidency paper: Sustainable rural development agricultural structure policy for rural areas
19 July 1999	Agriculture Council
13–14 September 1999	Informal Agriculture Council—Finnish Presidency paper: Agriculture and the new WTO round of negotiations
15–16 November 1999	Agriculture Council
14–15 December 1999	Agriculture Council
24 January 2000	Agriculture Council
20–21 March 2000	Agriculture Council
17–18 April 2000	Agriculture Council
29–30 May 2000	Informal Agriculture Council—Portuguese Presidency paper: Quality in diversity: a challenge for EU agriculture
19 June 2000	Agriculture Council
17 July 2000	Agriculture Council
21 November 2000	Agriculture Council
4 December 2000	Agriculture Council
19–20 December 2000	Agriculture Council
29 January 2001	Agriculture Council
26–27 February 2001	Agriculture Council
19–20 March 2001	Agriculture Council
24–25 April 2001	Agriculture Council

Lancashire Meat Trade

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the value to the Lancashire meat trade of the licensed movement to slaughter scheme. [157991]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 10 May 2001]:* We have been able to allow movement to slaughter under licence so that the risk of the spread of foot and mouth disease is reduced as far as possible. This has enabled the meat trade to resume operations but no estimate of the value of this to the Lancashire meat trade has been made.

Veterinary Medicine

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to fund schemes for mature students to study veterinary medicine. [160713]

Ms Quin: There are no plans to make funds available for schemes to assist mature students in the study of veterinary medicine.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what hourly payment rate has been agreed for veterinary surgeons engaged to deal with the foot and mouth problem; how many hours on average each vet has worked; how many vets have been detailed to work specifically on foot and mouth since the outbreak began; and which budget is being used to pay the additional vets' charges [160678]

Ms Quin: The temporary veterinary inspectors appointed to assist with foot and mouth disease work are paid a flat rate of £250 per day. The total number of veterinary surgeons who have been engaged by MAFF to deal with foot and mouth disease since the outbreak began is 1971. The average number of hours spent by vets specifically employed on foot and mouth is not available centrally.

Food Bills

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much a typical family would save in reduced food bills if CAP price supports were removed and prices fell to existing world prices, calculated on the same basis as for estimated savings from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP; and if he will make a statement. [160834]

Ms Quin: Published Ministry estimates of total consumer savings from the Agenda 2000 reforms measure the benefits for the year 2008, when the reforms will be fully implemented, against the forecast position in that year had no reform taken place. No estimate has been produced on a comparable basis of the savings that consumers would make in 2008 if all price supports for all commodities were removed.

Departmental Policies (Glasgow, Pollok)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Glasgow, Pollok constituency, the effect on Glasgow, Pollok of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [160826]

Ms Quin: MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU common agricultural policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or Scotland basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Glasgow, Pollok will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Glasgow, Pollok. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the rural development regulation. As agriculture is a devolved matter this is being implemented in Scotland by the Scottish Executive through the Scottish rural development programme (SRDP). Over the lifetime of the programme, around £685 million is being invested in agri-environment measures, forestry and the new less favoured areas support scheme. In addition, around £100 million will be spent in Scotland on measures including the processing and marketing scheme and the agricultural business development scheme.

By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, such measures offer benefits to all who visit the countryside.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of senior civil servants in his Department have signed waivers to work voluntarily more than 48 hours a week; and if he will make a statement. [160893]

Ms Quin: Three members of the Department's senior civil service complement have signed such voluntary agreements under the working time regulations. Of these, one has since expired and one other is no longer in force as the individual has left the Department.

Illegally Imported Meat

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what plans he has to improve surveillance of ports to intercept illegally imported meat; [160935]

(2) what steps he is taking to tackle the smuggling of illegal meat through British ports; [160933]

(3) if he will estimate the annual tonnage of illegal meat smuggled through British ports. [160906]

Ms Quin: As my right hon. Friend the Minister said in his statements of 27 March and 3 May, MAFF is co-ordinating action across Government to ensure that rules on both commercial and personal imports at ports and airports are enforced effectively. In addition, he has also asked the European Commission to give urgent attention to ensuring that the law on personal imports is clear and robust to enable consistent and effective controls across all the Community's borders. No assessment of the annual tonnage of illegal meat smuggled through British ports is available.

Broiler Chickens

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has undertaken into welfare problems affecting broiler chickens; and if he will make a statement. [160898]

Mr. Morley: We recognise that current systems of broiler chicken production raise a number of animal welfare issues on which more scientific knowledge is needed. This Department therefore continues to fund an extensive research programme into broiler chicken welfare, including projects focusing on key issues such as leg health and stocking densities.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to commission an independent survey of broiler lameness; how many unannounced visits were made by the state veterinary service to broiler units since he received the letter, dated 23 January, sent to him by the chairman of FAWC; and if he will make a statement. [160896]

Mr. Morley: We are currently considering, together with FAWC and the industry, the best way to take forward the issues they have identified on broiler chicken leg health, including the need for an independent survey. Completion of this work has been disrupted by activity on foot and mouth disease. The state veterinary service's programme of animal welfare farm inspections has been similarly disrupted.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations govern breeding procedures for broiler chickens. [160897]

Mr. Morley: In England, the welfare of broiler breeding chickens is regulated by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2000. Separate regulations apply in the devolved Administrations. Supplementary recommendations will appear in a new welfare code of recommendations for chickens and broiler breeders that is currently being finalised.

Dartmoor National Park

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he plans to reopen the Dartmoor national park to walkers and riders; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for its continued closure. [160901]

Ms Quin: The Ministry has issued advice to local authorities on the Foot and Mouth Disease (Amendment) (England) Order 2001 and the Foot and Mouth (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2001. These regulations allow local authorities to prohibit the movement of members of the public on to any land where there may be animals and on to any footpath or right of way within identified areas in their districts, for the purpose of preventing the spread of foot and mouth disease.

The Dartmoor national park is within an infected area, as defined by my Department. Infected areas are revoked only when it is considered that there is no risk of further outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and surveillance has confirmed that the area is free of disease.

We are working with the local authority and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ensure that the Dartmoor national park is opened to the public as soon as it is safe to do so.

Veterinary Laboratories Agency

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets he has set the Veterinary Laboratories Agency for 2001–02. [161115]

Mr. Nick Brown: I have set the Veterinary Laboratories Agency the following performance targets for 2001–02.

Efficiency

To achieve procurement savings of £400,000.

Set a baseline (first six months) and improve (second six months) the proportion of overheads against turnover.

Service delivery

To achieve 85 per cent. of ROAME R&D milestones.

To deliver 92 per cent. of export tests to published turnaround times.

Draw up a numerical transparent customer satisfaction system in agreement with customers.

Service quality

To achieve a satisfactory outcome of VLA's Independent Scientific Audit.

Achieve ISO9000 certification for Biotechnology.

Achieve UKAS accreditation for Laboratory testing at Lasswade.

To achieve UKAS accreditation for Mycoplasma serology, culture and identification.

Financial control

To recover the full economic cost (before exceptional items and calculated in accordance with resource accounting principles) of its services.

To achieve an overall income of at least £56.3 million from MAFF including the work won in open competition.

Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets he has set the Veterinary Medicines Directorate for 2001–02. [161117]

Mr. Nick Brown: I have set the Veterinary Medicines Directorate the following performance targets for 2001–02.

Safety and Quality

To provide high quality scientific assessment work.

To provide high quality policy advice to Ministers.

To comply with the timetables for entering Suspected Adverse Reactions (SAR) reports set out in the Plan and to report to the Veterinary Products Committee each quarter reviewing trends in SAR reports and identifying areas requiring evaluation.

Enter human reports onto the database within two working days.

Enter serious animal reports onto the database within two working days.

Enter non-serious animal reports onto the database within 10 working days.

To meet, in full, the requirements of the National Residues Surveillance Plans.

Standards of Service

To comply with the timetables for handling applications under the centralised, decentralised and UK procedures set out in the Plan.

Centralised Procedures

All assessments (including Maximum Residues Limits) to be submitted within timetables agreed with the European Medicines Evaluation Agency.

Decentralised Procedures

All authorisations to be determined within the regulatory timetables.

UK Procedures

93 per cent. of new marketing authorisations to be determined or referred to the Veterinary Products Committee within 120 clock days; all to be determined within 210 clock days.

Type 1 variations

Average time to complete first assessment to be less than 25 clock days.

Average time to sign off assessment to be less than 50 clock days.

99 per cent. of applications to be signed off by 60 clock days.

Type 2 variations

Average time to complete first assessment to be less than 55 clock days.

Average time to sign off assessment to be less than 110 clock days.

99 per cent of applications to be signed off by 120 clock days.

Old variations

Average time to complete first assessment to be less than 70 clock days.

Average time to sign off assessment to be less than 140 clock days.

99 per cent of applications to be signed off by 150 clock days.

Renewals

Average time to complete first assessment to be less than 80 clock days.

Average time to sign off assessment to be less than 165 clock days.

99 per cent. of applications to be signed off by 180 clock days.

Efficiency

To continue to collect data for 2001–02 with a view to establishing a three year rolling efficiency index. To establish a numerical baseline for timeliness of delivery from the results of the customer satisfaction surveys.

Financial Control

To recover from industry and Government the full economic cost taken as a whole of its main business activities of licensing and surveillance, policy work and residue monitoring without any cross subsidy between businesses.

Pesticides Safety Directorate

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets he has set the Pesticides Safety Directorate for 2001–02. [161116]

Mr. Nick Brown: I have set the Pesticides Safety Directorate the following performance targets for 2001–02.

Service Quality

To deliver the throughput of applications and processing times set out in the Plan.

To deliver high quality policy advice to Ministers and positively respond to their policy objectives.

To deliver high quality scientific work.

To implement a quality scheme: the objective will be to provide a framework that enables an improvement in quality, efficiency and consistency (verified by customer satisfaction results).

Efficiency

To achieve efficiency savings of 2 per cent. in administration costs.

Financial Control

To recover from industry and Government the full economic cost (calculated according to resource principles) of its service.

Table 1: New Substances and Reviews

Application type	*Planned receipts*	*Planned completions*	*Processing time (weeks)*
New active substances			
Sift	8	8	6
Evaluation:			
full	8	7	48
resubmission	4	4	48
Post Annex 1 Approvals	30	30	—
Reviews—UK			
UK anticholinesterase review programme—full reviews	—	15	—
Other UK review activity	3	9	—
UK review regulatory notices	—	26	—
Reviews—EC			
EU rapporteur reviews	—	—	—
Total	53	99	[1]90%

Note:

The figures for New Substances and Reviews are based on work in hand and forecasts from Industry and the Commission

Table 2: Technical Secretariat

Application type	*Planned receipts*	*Planned completions*	*Processing time (weeks)*
Normal	165	180	35
Associated Fast-Normals	55	60	35
Departmental Normal	5	5	45
Departmental Experimental Approval	2	2	45
Department Off Label	1	1	45
Assessed Experimental Approval	2	2	20
Extrapolated Experimental Approval	2	2	10
Emergency Off Label	25	25	10
Non-emergency Off Label	40	40	30
Fast	220	220	10
Parallel imports	50	50	10
Administrative Fast	650	650	4
Administrative Experimental	100	100	1
Simplified own-use parallel	10	10	2
Mutual recognition	3	3	20
Total	1,330	1,350	—

Application type	*Planned receipts*	*Planned completions*	*Processing time (weeks)*
Total (Table 1 and 2)	1,383	1,449	[1]90%

[1] Overall targets—90 per cent. of applications with a stated processing time must be completed within that time.

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what targets he has set the Central Science Laboratory for 2001–02. [161114]

Mr. Nick Brown: I have set the Central Science Laboratory the following performance targets for 2001–02.

Financial control

To recover the full economic costs of operation on a resource accounting basis, recognising the normal costs of operation.

Efficiency

To deliver the efficiency targets set out in the Business Plan.

Achieve a ratio of 79:21 or better of direct fee-earning staff in relation to total overhead staff.

Achieve a minimum of £73,000 income per fee earner.

Achieve a minimum of £21,000 non-MAFF income per fee earner.

Quality and service delivery

To achieve a minimum of 85 per cent. of project milestones in MAFF commissioned projects.

To achieve a mean score of 3.7 on a scale of 0 to 5 for the assessment of customer satisfaction using the revised methodology.

To implement a new financial system by March 2002.

To manage the Agency in an effective manner.

Dispensing Review

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the report of the independent review of dispensing by veterinary surgeons of prescription-only medicines. [161127]

Mr. Nick Brown: I am grateful for the work of the team led by Sir John Marsh in producing a comprehensive report. I am pleased to announce that their Report has been published today and a copy placed in the Library of the House. The recommendations contained in the report will need to be considered carefully by the new Administration before a full response can be made.

Throckmorton Burial Site

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if it is his policy to dispose of carcases from Devon at the Throckmorton airfield site; and if he will make a statement; [159270]

(2) when he will provide a substantive reply to the questions from the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire, to which he has received holding answers, relating to aspects of the disposal of carcases at Throckmorton airfield. [160110]

Ms Quin: There are no plans to dispose of carcases from Devon at Throckmorton airfield.

I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to him on 30 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 496–99W, 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 597–600W, 8 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 130; and 10 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 298.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Loyalist paramilitary groups are involved in preparing, commissioning and conducting attacks upon perceived Catholics, Nationalists and Republicans and their property; if he will list the geographical areas in which each group has centred its activity and indicate the paramilitary origin or predecessor organisation of each group; and what his estimate is of the number of active Loyalist paramilitary group affiliates. [159549]

Mr. Ingram: The indications are that such attacks are attributable to each of the main Loyalist paramilitary groupings, their associates or sympathisers. Unfortunately, these attacks have occurred throughout the Province but primarily occur within the major conurbations. It is not possible to be definite about the numbers attached to each grouping.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* punishment beatings, *(b)* punishment shootings and *(c)* murders there were in Northern Ireland in (i) each week and (ii) each month from 1 January to 31 March; and if he will indicate for each week and month how many of those crimes were committed by (A) Republican, (B) Loyalist and (C) other groups. [159388]

Mr. Ingram: The tables provide the information requested.

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks

(by week)

	Shootings		*Assaults*	
1 January 2001–25 April 2001	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*
1–7 January	1	1	2	3
8–14 January	3	3	1	—
15–21 January	—	1	7	4
22–28 January	4	1	1	—
29 January-4 February	4	2	2	—
5–11 February	—	—	1	1
12–18 February	1	2	4	3
19–25 February	1	—	2	1
26 February-4 March	4	2	4	1
5–11 March	2	2	5	4
12–18 March	3	3	1	2
19–25 March	4	—	—	1
26 March-1 April	4	2	2	2
2–8 April	4	—	2	2
9–15 April	2	3	3	—
16–22 April	4	—	—	1
23–25 April	2	—	1	—
Total	43	22	38	25

(by month)

	Shootings		*Assaults*	
January 2001–25 April 2001	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*
January	12	6	12	7
February	4	5	8	5
March	15	8	12	10
April (to 25th)	12	3	6	3
Total	43	22	38	25

Deaths due to the security situation

(by week)

1 January 2001–25 April 2001	*Number*
1–7 January	1
8–14 January	—
15–21 January	—
22–28 January	—
29 January-4 February	—
5–11 February	—
12–18 February	—
19–25 February	—
26 February-4 March	—
5–11 March	—
12–18 March	1
19–25 March	—
26 March-1 April	1
2–8 April	—
9–15 April	1
16–22 April	1
23–25 April	—
Total	5

(by month)

January 2001–25 April 2001	*Number*
January	1
February	—
March	2
April (to 25th)	2
Total	5

Note:

2000–01 figures are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* punishment beatings, *(b)* punishment shootings and *(c)* murders there were in Northern Ireland in (i) each week and (ii) each month from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000; and if he will indicate for each week and month how many of those crimes were committed by (A) Republican, (B) Loyalist and (C) other groups. [159387]

Mr. Ingram: The tables provide the information requested.

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks from January-December 2000 (by week)

	Shootings		*Assaults*	
	By Loyalists	*By Republicans*	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*
1–2 January	1	—	—	—
3–9 January	—	—	4	—
10–16 January	2	—	1	—
17–23 January	—	—	—	—
24–30 January	—	—	3	1
31 January-6 February	1	—	3	1
7–13 February	1	—	—	—
14–20 February	1	—	2	1
21–27 February	1	—	—	1
28 February-5 March	3	—	1	—
6–12 March	2	3	2	1
13–19 March	4	2	—	1
20–26 March	—	—	3	1
27 March-2 April	2	2	3	1
3–9 April	—	5	1	3
10–16 April	—	2	2	—
17–23 April	—	1	—	2
24–30 April	6	—	2	2
1–7 May	5	4	2	1
8–14 May	2	—	2	4
15–21 May	2	—	2	2
22–28 May	—	1	—	1
29 May-4 June	—	1	2	—
5–11 June	—	—	2	1
12–18 June	3	—	4	1
19–25 June	2	2	—	2
26 June-2 July	1	—	—	—
3–9 July	8	1	1	2
10–16 July	2	1	2	—
17–23 July	1	—	—	1
24–30 July	1	—	1	2
31 July-6 August	2	—	6	—
7–13 August	1	1	1	—
14–20 August	—	1	3	—
21–27 August	—	1	1	1
28 August-3 September	3	3	—	2
4–10 September	3	2	4	2
11–17 September	3	—	2	1
18–24 September	—	1	—	1
25 September-1 October	3	2	—	2
2–8 October	4	3	—	—
9–15 October	4	—	3	1
16–22 October	—	—	1	2
23–29 October	1	1	—	—
30 October-5 November	—	2	—	1
6–12 November	1	1	1	—
13–19 November	2	1	—	1

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks from January-December 2000 (by week)

	Shootings		*Assaults*	
	By Loyalists	*By Republicans*	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*
20–26 November	—	—	3	2
27 November-3 December	—	2	2	1
4–10 December	1	1	2	1
11–17 December	3	2	—	1
18–24 December	4	1	3	2
25–31 December	—	—	1	1
Total 2000	86	50	78	54

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks from January-December 2000 (by month)

	Shootings		*Assaults*	
	By Loyalists	*By Republicans*	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*
January	3	—	9	1
February	4	—	4	3
March	11	6	8	4
April	6	9	6	7
May	9	5	6	8
June	6	3	8	4
July	13	2	4	5
August	5	6	11	3
September	8	5	6	6
October	10	5	4	3
November	3	4	5	5
December	8	5	7	5
Total 2000	86	50	78	54

Deaths due to the security situation from January-December 2000 (by week)

Date	*Number*
1–2 January	—
3–19 January	—
10–16 January	1
17–23 January	—
24–30 January	—
31 January-6 February	—
7–13 February	—
14–20 February	2
21–27 February	—
28 February-5 March	—
6–12 March	—
13–19 March	—
20–26 March	—
27 March-2 April	—
3–9 April	—
10–16 April	—
17–23 April	—
24–30 April	—
1–7 May	—
8–14 May	—
15–21 May	—
22–28 May	1
29 May-4 June	1
5–11 June	—
12–18 June	—
19–25 June	—
26 June-2 July	—
3–9 July	—
10–16 July	1
17–23 July	—
24–30 July	—
31 July-6 August	—
7–13 August	—
14–20 August	—
21–27 August	3
28 August-3 September	—
4–10 September	—

Deaths due to the security situation from January-December 2000 (by week)

Date	Number
11–17 September	—
18–24 September	—
25 September-1 October	1
2–8 October	—
9–15 October	1
16–22 October	—
23–29 October	1
30 October-5 November	3
6–12 November	—
13–19 November	—
20–26 November	—
27 November-3 December	—
4–10 December	2
11–17 December	—
18–24 December	1
25–31 December	—
Total 2000	18

Deaths due to the security situation from January-December 2000

Month	Number
January	1
February	2
March	—
April	—
May	2
June	—
July	1
August	3
September	1
October	4
November	1
December	3
Total 2000	18

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* punishment beatings, *(b)* punishment shootings and *(c)* murders there were in Northern Ireland in each week from 1 April to 30 April; and if he will indicate for each week and how many of those crimes were committed by (A) Republican, (B) Loyalist and (C) other groups. [159389]

Mr. Ingram: The tables provide the information requested.

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks from 1 April to 25 April 2001

	By Loyalist	By Republican
Shootings		
1 April	—	—
2–8 April	4	—
9–15 April	2	3
16–22 April	4	—
23–25 April	2	—
Total 1 to 25 April	12	3
Assaults		
1 April	—	—
2–8 April	2	2
9–15 April	3	—
16–22 April	—	1
23–25 April	1	—
Total 1 to 25 April	6	3

Deaths due to the security situation from 1 to 25 April 2001

Date	Number
1 April	—
2–8 April	—
9–15 April	1
16–22 April	1
23–25 April	—
Total 1 to 25 April	2

Note:

2001 figures are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* punishment beatings, *(b)* punishment shootings and *(c)* murders there were in Northern Ireland in (i) each week and (ii) each month from 1 January to 28 February; and if he will indicate for each week and month how many of those crimes were committed by (A) Republican, (B) Loyalist and (C) other groups. [155913]

Mr. Ingram: The tables show the information requested from 1 January 2001 to the most recent date of 25 March.

Security situation statistics—Deaths 2001

	By Loyalists	By Republicans
By week		—
1–7 January	1	—
8–14 January	—	—
15–21 January	—	—
22–28 January	—	—
29 January-4 February	—	—
5–11 February	—	—
12–18 February	—	—
19–25 February	—	—
26 February-4 March	—	—
5–11 March	—	—
12–18 March	1	—
19–25 March	—	—
By month		
January	1	—
February	—	—
1–25 March	1	—

Notes:

1. Includes all deaths due to the security situation
2. 2001 figures are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks 2001

	Assaults		*Shootings*	
	By Loyalists	*By Republicans*	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*
1–7 January	2	3	1	1
8–14 January	1	—	3	3
15–21 January	6	5	—	1
22–28 January	1	—	4	1
29 January-4 February	2	—	4	2
5–11 February	1	1	—	—
12–18 February	4	3	—	2
19–25 February	3	—	1	—
26 February-4 March	4	—	4	2
5–11 March	4	7	2	2
12–18 March	1	2	3	3
19–25 March	1	1	4	—

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks 2001

	Assaults		*Shootings*	
	By Loyalists	*By Republicans*	*By Loyalists*	*By Republicans*
By month				
January	11	8	12	6
February	9	4	3	5
1–25 March	10	10	11	6

Note:

2001 figures are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment

Official Visits

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the visits outside Britain made by his Department's Permanent Secretary on official business since 14 July 2000, indicating the date and purpose of the visit in each case. [159795]

Mr. Ingram: Since 14 July 2000 the Permanent Secretary has made the following visits outside the United Kingdom on official business:

Date	*Visit*
10 August 2000	Dublin—Meeting with officials from the Irish Department of Justice
8 December 2000	Dublin—Meeting with officials from the Irish Department of Justice
30 September to 8 October 2000	Washington, USA—Meetings with officials in the US Department of Justice, the State Department and the FBI; meeting with the Irish Ambassador and key officials at the British Embassy dealing with Northern Ireland; lunch with Congressional Staffers Boston, USA—Meetings with Irish American leaders, addressed a politics class at Northeastern University; meeting with Boston Police Commissioner New York, USA—Meetings with the Consul General of Ireland, the New York Bar Association, the New York City Comptroller and Irish American leaders

Organised Crime

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the groups identified as meeting the 1999 NCIS definition of organised crime comprise *(a)* fewer than 10 members, *(b)* 10 to 25 members, *(c)* 25 to 100 members and *(d)* more than 100 members; how many groups in each size band have their origins or initial association in a local unit of (i) Republican, (ii) Loyalist and (iii) other paramilitary organisations; and how many groups in each size band are focused around criminal activity within a local or district territory. [158787]

Mr. Ingram: The information cannot be made available in the form requested. However, I can state that 78 groups involving some 400 individuals have been identified as meeting the 1999 NCIS definition of organised crime. Of these 78 groups, no one group exceeds 25 members. Just over half of the groups identified have current or historical links to Republican or Loyalist paramilitary organisations. The vast majority of the groups identified are focused around criminal activity within a local or district territory.

Oversight Commissioner

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what meetings have taken place, on what dates, between the Change Management Team and *(a)* the Oversight Commissioner and *(b)* his staff. [160321]

Mr. Ingram: The Commissioner has visited Northern Ireland on five occasions. I understand that on each occasion he has met members of the RUC Change Management Team. Several meetings have also taken place between the Change Management Team, the members of the Commissioner's Evaluation Team, and the Commissioner's Chief of Staff.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which officials have held meetings with *(a)* the Oversight Commissioner and *(b)* members of his staff; and on what dates. [160318]

Mr. Ingram: The Commissioner has visited Northern Ireland on five occasions. On each occasion he has met officials. Several meetings have also taken place between officials and the members of the Commissioner's Evaluation Team. There have also been regular meetings between officials and the Commissioner's Chief of Staff since he took up his appointment in January 2001.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which police stations have been visited by *(a)* the Oversight Commissioner and *(b)* members of his staff; and on what dates. [160319]

Mr. Ingram: The Commissioner has visited Northern Ireland on five occasions. During his time in Northern Ireland he has visited the following police stations:

Police headquarters—Brooklyn

Police headquarters—Knocknagoney

Ballymena RUC station

Portrush RUC station

Newtownards RUC station

Mahon Road RUC station

Crossmaglen RUC station

Musgrave Street RUC station

Grosvenor Road RUC station

Strand Road RUC station

Waterside RUC station

Newry RUC station

Omagh RUC station

Bangor RUC station

Larne RUC station

Sprucefield RUC training establishment

Garnerville RUC training establishment.

On several occasions he was accompanied by his Chief of Staff and his Evaluation Team.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what meetings have taken place, on what dates, between the Oversight Commissioner and the Chief Constable. [160320]

Mr. Ingram: The Commissioner has visited Northern Ireland on five occasions. I understand that on each occasion he has met the Chief Constable.

Crime

Mr. Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he proposes to take to halt the rising crime rate in the Province. [159867]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Ulster Constabulary, encouraged and supported by the Government, has taken a number of strategic and tactical steps to address the occurrence of crime across the Province.

The recent restructuring of the RUC and the establishment of District Command Units has devolved greater autonomy to local commanders in the use of their resources to tackle 'volume crimes' such as burglary, assaults and criminal damage. They are supported in their efforts by the introduction of the National Intelligence Model throughout the Province. The on-going training and provision of police analysts to highlight problem crimes and problem areas will further assist the maximum effective use of resources through 'directed patrolling'. This information led approach is underpinned by the RUC's community policing model which will ensure that local officers and local partnerships work together in 'sectors' to more readily address local crimes and anti-social behaviour.

At a strategic level the Royal Ulster Constabulary and its partner agencies, including the Government, are working within the Organised Crime Task Force in furtherance of the drive against organised criminal gangs. The Government remain committed to ensuring that law enforcement agencies and other partners within the criminal justice system have the necessary legislative powers to be fully effective against criminals at all levels. The Criminal Justice Review has been completed and work is continuing on the Criminal Justice Bill and implementation plan.

Decommissioning

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the decommissioning of terrorist weapons since 1 May 2000. [159865]

Mr. Ingram: Mr. Ramaphosa and Mr. Ahtisaari have reported that they have completed a second inspection of several IRA dumps. On both occasions they reported the dumps held a substantial amount of military material, including explosives and weapons. They remain confident that these weapons and explosives cannot be used without them being aware of it.

This together with the Decommissioning Commission's statement in March announcing its re-engagement with the IRA, represents further progress and an honouring of commitments given by the IRA at the beginning of May 2000.

Charles Conlon

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the criminal convictions are of Charles Conlon, a prisoner in HMP Maghaberry; when his most recent conviction was; what sentence he is serving; how many days he has served in solitary confinement; and if he will make a statement on the circumstances of his punishment. [159563]

Mr. Ingram: Charles Conlon's criminal record currently runs to 16 pages and spans a period of 22 years. It includes convictions for 12 counts of criminal damage, 18 counts of burglary, theft, five counts of riotous/disorderly behaviour, 12 counts of common assault, 17 road traffic offences, 25 assaults on police, three counts of deception, 15 serious assaults, four robberies, two counts of possessing an offensive weapon, eight counts of obstructing police and two incidents of arson. Charges in relation to an incident in which he bit a prison officer twice are currently being investigated by the police.

His most recent conviction was on 16 January 2001 when he received two six-month sentences for assaulting two prison officers. These sentences were to be served consecutively to a two and half year sentence, imposed on 14 October 1999, for threats to kill, assaults on police, perjury and assault. His current earliest date of release (EDR) is 29 July 2001.

Mr. Conlon has an unenviable record of poor behaviour during his present period of imprisonment. He has been charged and adjudicated upon for offences against prison discipline on 70 separate occasions. He has a propensity for, and history of, serious assaults on prison staff and other prisoners. He has been held in the Punishment and Segregation Unit (PSU) at HMP Maghaberry since 21 November 1999, under Rule 32 of The Prison and Young Offenders (NI) Rules 1995. This is to restrict his association for the maintenance of good order and discipline within the prison. Recent efforts to reintegrate Mr. Conlon into the ordinary prison population have been unsuccessful.

Judgment on a Judicial Review hearing earlier this year to examine Mr. Conlon's conditions of imprisonment has been reserved.

RUC Reserve

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the time scale is for the proposed disbandment of the full-time RUC Reserve. [159866]

Mr. Ingram: The process of phasing out the full-time Reserve will not begin before the first recruits to the Police Service of Northern Ireland complete their training early in 2002. The precise timing will depend on the prevailing security situation and policing requirements.

RUC Officers (Psychiatric Illnesses)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many past and present members of the RUC have submitted claims against the Chief Constable for the effects of *(a)* post-traumatic stress disorder and *(b)* other psychiatric illnesses; how many claims have been settled to date; and at what cost. [159550]

Mr. Ingram: Up to 30 April 2001, there have been 625 claims against the Chief Constable for the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder and two claims for other psychiatric illnesses. These claims are still being investigated.

Offences against Children

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many convictions for offences against children aged under-18 years there were, broken down by sentence type in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01. [159848]

Mr. Ingram: This information is currently unavailable.

Police Injuries

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police officers in Northern Ireland have been injured on duty in each of the last 24 months, indicating in each case if the injuries were *(a)* accidental and *(b)* the result of assault by (i) Republican, (ii) Loyalist, and (iii) other persons. [159470]

Mr. Ingram: The table shows the number of police officers in the Royal Ulster Constabulary injured on duty over the period 1 April 1999 to 28 February 2001 (the latest date for which information is available). Information on whether injuries were accidental or the result of Republican, Loyalist or other assault is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. However, a breakdown has been provided on injuries as a result of the security situation.

Number of RUC officers injured on duty—1 April 1999 to 28 February 2001

	Security situation	*Total*
1999		
April	13	159
May	59	213
June	33	221
July	36	210
August	85	244
September	25	179
October	12	189
November	21	217
December	20	246
2000		
January	16	197
February	13	178
March	23	211
April	8	192
May	19	198
June	32	224
July	198	359
August	15	146
September	36	158
October	31	155
November	27	139
December	28	90
2001		
January	19	72
February	17	36
Total	786	4,233

Mr. Neil Mulholland

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what capacity Mr. Neil Mulholland is employed by the Northern Ireland Office; when his employment began; and when his contract of employment is due to expire. [159921]

Dr. Reid: Mr. Neil Mulholland has been employed as a Senior Information Officer since 20 May 1996. As a permanent employee his normal retirement date would be at age 60.

Strand Road RUC Station

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the identity of the organisation responsible for the *(a)* recent attack on the Strand Road RUC Station in Londonderry and *(b)* the death of Mr. C. O'Kane at Currynerin, Londonderry. [159471]

Mr. Ingram: In both cases Royal Ulster Constabulary investigations are on-going. There is no information or intelligence available to identify a specific organisation/s as being responsible and no organisation/s has claimed responsibility.

Vehicle Theft

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cars have been stolen in each district policing area in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; and how many vehicles were recovered within seven days and reported as having been stolen for joy-riding or similar purposes. [160289]

Mr. Ingram: It is only possible to provide the number of recorded offences of theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicles over the past three years. Due to a change in Home Office counting rules, figures prior to 1998 are not comparable. Information on recovery times and the reason for thefts is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Notifiable offences of theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicles 1998–99 to 2000–01

RUC Division	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
A	2,018	2,250	2,785
B	1,798	2,040	2,074
D	1,800	1,711	1,839
E	823	888	936
G	531	637	665
H	485	527	485
J	471	608	547
K	251	254	243
L	312	330	294
N	472	368	343
O	379	280	353
P	375	303	242
Total	9,715	10,196	10,806

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been arrested for stealing cars in each Northern Ireland police district in each of the past five years; and how many have been *(a)* successfully prosecuted and *(b)* sentenced to a non-custodial sentence. [160290]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Special Advisers

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160052]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160033]

Mr. Ingram: Since 3 May 1997, no more than two special advisers have been in post at any one time.